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An Investigation into How Helpers Ascribe Meanings to the Phenomenon of Work – Accommodation Exchange

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Abstract

Offering (or receiving) work in exchange for free accommodation is a service that we have in tourism industry today and it has become a worldwide phenomenon. In such exchanges, helpers come to the hosts' home and are expected to contribute a pre-agreed amount of time per day (most often four to five hours of work a day) in exchange for lodging and food, which is provided by the hosts. This master thesis is aiming to find out how helpers ascribe meanings in such work-accommodation exchange. In the history of the itinerant travelling, there are multiple forms of itinerant travelling can be seen as antecedents to the phenomenon of work-accommodation exchange today. Thus, this master thesis went through many literatures of itinerant travelling forms in the history to analogize the cultural and social dimensions of work-accommodation exchange. Seven former helpers with different background have selected to be interviewed. This master thesis touches on the characteristics of the helpers, the work element, leisure, vulnerability, post work-accommodation exchange experiences, antecedents and new trends in this phenomenon.

Key word: Work-accommodation exchange, WWOOF, Helpx, Workaway, Itinerant Travelling

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Chapter 1 Introduction

‘Contemporary societies have witnessed the expansion of unconventional, non-institutionalized travel trends’ (Forno & Garibaldi, 2015, p. 202). Such expansion generates competition for mainstream tourism by offering travelers more diverse, convenient and affordable styles of travel alternatives (Forno & Garibaldi, 2015). Among these, offering (or receiving) work in exchange for free accommodation is a service that exists in the tourism industry today. Using international online platforms, registered travelers can contact registered hosts, request to join homestays and engage in cultural exchange with local hosts. The registered hosts can also invite registered travelers, also known as helpers through these platforms. In such exchanges, helpers come to the hosts’ home and are expected to contribute a pre-agreed amount of time per day (most often four to five hours of work a day) in exchange for lodging and food, which is provided by the hosts. The work the helpers do is most often labor involving weeding, housekeeping, painting. The style of lodging that hosts provide can vary from private rooms to shared rooms, caravan cars or even boats. The most well-known and influential websites providing such services are helpx, Workaway, WWOOF (worldwide opportunities on organic farms).

Offering (or receiving) work in exchange for free accommodation has become a worldwide phenomenon and you can find hosts in every continent, for example, in February 2018, there were four hosts in Madagascar and 90 hosts in Cambodia (Helpx, 2018). On the helpx website, the region with most registered hosts is Australia (with more than 8,000 hosts in February 2018) and New Zealand (Helpx, 2018). Work for exchange of accommodation is also popular in the backpacker and working holiday-maker community as these two groups share some similarities with the helper group, which will be discussed later in this thesis.

The hosts in this work for exchange of accommodation phenomenon usually have their own property and they have some work with which they require assistance. In some of the countries, the labor price is very high and having helpers do the work

could save hosts a lot of money. Many of the hosts are retired people or young couples with children. The helpers in this exchange are relatively young, and highly mobile. They usually have abundant time but tight budgets. So, living in the hosts' property could save them a lot of money. The exchanges also give helpers 'a chance of an immediate in to local life' (Bowes, 2009, p. 5). Cultural exchange in this process is also valuable. For helpers, this work-accommodation exchange can be seen as a form of itinerant travelling.

I traveled and worked as a helper in Australia, France and Canada myself using helpx and Workaway. A typical day for me could be 4 hours cleaning up the spider webs inside the window frame for the host and then borrowing his bicycle to cycle on the Île d'Oléron island or 6 hours of picking up eggs and packing eggs during the day and watching TV together with other helpers in the evening on a chicken farm in Western Australia. As I reflect on my experience, it inspired me to gain a closer look at the work-accommodation exchange phenomenon, especially, from the helpers' perspective.

1.1 Research Question

For this thesis, my aim was to gain an in-depth understanding of work-accommodation exchanges as a form of itinerant travel used by helpers. Understanding how this work-accommodation exchange works and what happens in the various stages of the process can help inform people about this phenomenon. It will also assist in understanding helpers' experiences as tourism experiences and aid in the development and optimization of platforms such as helpx. Within extant literature, there are very few studies of this phenomenon, not to mention studies focusing on helpers. Yet, there are many interesting aspects of this tourism phenomenon, for example: who are the hosts and why they decide to have strangers as volunteers in their homes; who are the helpers and what background, motivations do

they have; what it is like to work in somebody's house and spend time with their family members; what are the nuances compared to traditional backpacking?

As I mentioned above, there are many perspectives of this relatively new tourism phenomenon that deserve research attention, however, in this thesis, I narrow the focus to helpers' experiences of work-accommodation exchanges based on in-depth interviews and my observations on-site. I wanted to study how these helpers describe their experiences of being a helper after the experience and with time to reflect on those experiences. Thus, my research question was: how do helpers ascribe meanings to the phenomenon of work-accommodation exchange? This question was used as a way of finding out about helpers' travel experiences and their descriptions of this particular form of travel. Unveiling the understandings helpers see in their experiences helps us to understand some of the core characteristics of work-accommodation exchange, and relatedly, to understand better this itinerant travel form.

My theoretical perspectives were based on literature about former itinerant travel practices as this helped me to sort out how wandering youth travel developed (from the Grand tour, tramping, drifter to later backpackers, WWOOFers, etc.). In addition, the literature informed me of what characteristics work-accommodation exchange had inherited and developed from earlier tourism phenomena. Cohen's (1972) analysis of the 'drifter' was an essential piece of literature for this thesis as it provided a frame for my analysis of helpers' characteristics. I also adopted the views from literature related to other non-conventional travel trends, which have become 'increasingly relational, peer-to-peer, and user-generated and have been further accelerated by recent advances in information technology' (Forno & Garibaldi, 2015, p. 207).

The empirical material is based on qualitative, semi-structured interviews with seven helpers from different backgrounds. The semi-structured interviews provided several vivid sketches of travel experiences along with laughs, tears, benefits, and difficulties, which catalyze helpers' understandings of this alternative way of travel. I combined

the semi-structured interview information with my own observations on-site to analyze this phenomenon.

1.2 Background of the work-accommodation exchange phenomenon

There are slight differences between the three most well-known work-accommodation exchange websites. This thesis mainly focuses on Helpx and Workaway as these are slightly different to WWOOF.

WWOOF (<http://wwooof.net>) was established in 1971. Its website mainly focuses on farming, organic farming and permaculture. It is 'a hospitality service operated by a loose network of national organizations that facilitate homestays on organic farms' (WWOOF, 2018, p. 2). The WWOOFers commit to work a certain amount of time and instead of getting paid, they receive housing and food from their hosts. Subscription fees to WWOOF vary from one country to another. These fees can be anything from US\$0 – US\$72 / 0 Euro – 56 Euro (WWOOF, 2018).

Helpx (<https://www.helpx.net>) was founded in 2001. Its original idea was to build an online system to help local farmers in Australia and New Zealand find volunteer workers and help backpackers to find room and board (Helpx, 2018). Helpx includes farmstays but is not restricted to just farmstays. There are also many hosts in urban areas. A two years membership fee is currently 20 EUR. During that period, you have access and the ability to send messages to hosts. As a member, you have access to hosts from a range of countries. With a broader focus, Workaway (<https://www.workaway.info>) was founded in 2002. Workaway promotes volunteering, family exchanges, homestays, farmstays, working holidays, travel buddies and it also offers chances for language learners to immerse themselves completely in related first-language speaking environments (Workaway.info, 2018). The register fee for a single user is 34 EUR for one year.

All three platforms provide work-accommodation exchange opportunities. Helpx and Workaway have a wider focus compared to WWOOF. The informants in this study

were mainly members of Helpx or Workaway. However, in browsing the three websites, I have noted that some hosts register on all three websites. They do this because they want to be exposed to a larger audience. Both hosts and helpers have a home page so that others can read their profile. The host's profile usually contains an introduction of who they are, their location, the category of their place (farmstay, homestay, hostel, accommodation business, boat and others), the length of the stay, the work that needs to be done, the skills they require, the accommodation and meals they provide (ordinary, vegan, vegetarian, etc.), and some other special requirements. The length of the profile varies. On the helpers' web page, they usually write about who they are, their plans for travel, their skills and hobbies, their former travel experiences, etc. Before arrival, arrangements are agreed upon by the host and the helper without the involvement of a third party. The agreement may consist of transactional aspects relating to work, food, accommodation and learning opportunities while the relational aspects involves social life and cultural exchange (Alvarez, 2012).

The above description provides a background of the phenomenon of work-accommodation exchange. The rest of the thesis is structured in the following way:

Chapter 2 contains the theoretical framework and theories to which I refer in this thesis. It provides an overview of itinerant travel practices throughout history.

Chapter 3 provides a chronological explanation on how the empirical material was collected and analyzed. I explain my background, choice of research method, development of interview guide, and the selection of my informants.

Chapter 4 first presents the analysis by going through the 6 themes I developed and there is constant movement going back and forth between theory and the empirical materials.

Chapter 5 presents the results. I sum up the most important findings of my research as well as present suggestions for further research.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

As work-accommodation exchange is still a limited phenomenon in tourism studies, very little literature exists directly related to helpx and Workaway. Subsequently, for the first part of my literature review, I chose to go back in time and read through the literature of some related forms of itinerant travel such as drifters and backpacking. It helps to analogize the cultural and social dimensions of work-accommodation exchange, as many of their characteristics appear to be in one continuous line. This part of the literature provides a foundation for my later analysis of the characteristics of helpers in work-accommodation exchanges. Consequently, I will first present literature regarding itinerant travel practices in a chronological order. Then, I will move on to some studies about WWOOF, as well as some other alternative forms of travel such as Home Exchanges.

2.2 Itinerant travel forms through history

Cohen commented that 'tourism as a cultural phenomenon becomes possible only when man develops a generalized interest in things beyond his particular habitat, when contact with and appreciation and enjoyment of strangeness and novelty are valued for their sake' (E. Cohen, 1972, p. 165). Vogt (1976) aimed to 'illustrate that young wanderers are particularly well suited to travel and that they are primarily motivated by experiences offering personal growth' (p. 37).

As we can see from Loker-Murphy & Pearce's (1995), framework (see figure 1), as early as in the 17th and 18th century, there were the Grand Tours, and tramping, and the youth hostel movement were established before the term 'drifter' came into view (p. 821). The Grand Tour refers to travel practice of 'the affluent, well-educated youth of the late Victorian period, who set out on adventure trips to experience the hidden, strange, and exotic life of foreign countries and unknown people' (Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995, p. 820). 'The tramping tradition, which was not restricted to the affluent

and the privileged, was a contributor to the development of backpacker tourism as one feature in it is that of casual employment and training' (Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995, p. 822). The youth movement refers to 'young adults from the more affluent countries, who began spending their leisure time discovering the beauties of the unspoilt countryside', in reaction to 'the harsh conditions of urban life in the industrial cities of 19th century Europe' (Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995, p. 822).

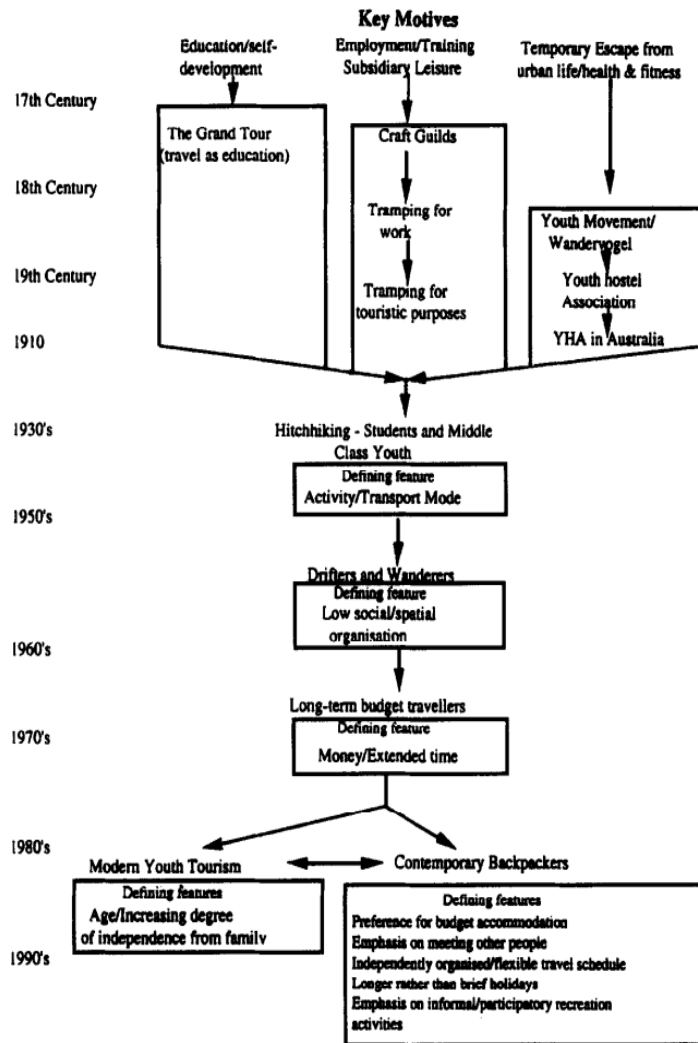


Figure1. The Backpacker Phenomenon An Evolutionary Framework (Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995, p. 821)

The term 'drifter' arises from a sociological typology of tourists, where roles of the tourists are categorized on a continuous sequence from 'organized mass tourist' to 'individual mass tourist' to 'explorer' to 'drifter' (E. Cohen, 1972). The levels of

novelty and familiarity associated with each role determine this typology of tourists. Erik Cohen (1972) indicates that even the most adventurous traveler needs some form of familiarities and he refers to these kinds of familiarities as an 'environmental bubble'. Inside the 'environmental bubble', the traveler can function, perform and interact with others in a similar way as in their own country (E. Cohen, 1972). The drifter is the type of tourist, who requires the highest level of novelty and lowest level of familiarity.

Cohen (1972, p. 168) described the 'drifter' as follow:

'The drifter. This type of tourist ventures furthest away from the beaten track and from the accustomed ways of life of his[/her] home country. He[/she] shuns any kind of connection with the tourist establishment and considers the ordinary tourist experience phony. He[/she] tends to make it wholly on his[/her] own, living with the people and often taking odd-jobs to keep himself[/herself] going. He[/she] tries to live the way the people he[/she] visits live, and to share their shelter, foods, and habits, keeping only the most basic and essential of his[/her] old customs. The drifter has no fixed itinerary or timetable and no well-defined goals of travel. He[/she] is almost wholly immersed in his[/her] host culture. Novelty is here at its highest, familiarity disappears almost completely.'

'The resulting diversification in travel patterns may be caused by the need to seek variety, and individual levels of arousal may be heightened by adding more variety to vacation experiences' (Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995, p. 823). 'As drifting moves from a marginal counter-culture to a more mainstream phenomenon, the notion of a drifter tourist is a key departure point in the development of the literature on backpacker tourism which brings together studies of drifting, wandering, tramping, the Grand Tour and youth budget tourism' (S. A. Cohen, 2015, p. 1).

Vogt (1976) prefers the term 'wandering', he sees 'wandering' as an opportunity to generate 'feelings of mastery over the self and the environment' and 'exercise personal control in making their choices and achieving their goals' (Vogt, 1976, p. 36).

In the sense of interpersonal relations, Vogt (1976) identified that ‘the wanderer lives in the “perceptual now” and they have the awareness of brevity encourages a sense of immediacy’ (p. 34). Ateljevic & Doorne (2004) argue that ‘Vogt’s and Cohen’s observations in the 1970s provided the foundation for a bifurcation of subsequent research trajectories, whereas Cohen’s discussion provides the foundation for contextualizing behavior in terms of society and change, Vogt’s contribution has opened the door for the exploration of the internal dynamics of backpacker culture and consumer psychology’ (p. 64). Graburn (1983) and Riley (1988) agree that present budget travel is a type of *rite of passage* of self-testing tourism. This type of self-testing tourism is most common among people who are in conjunction of different life stages like adulthood, job changes or divorce (Riley, 1988). They point out that ‘budget travelers are clearly different from the drifters’, and today’s typical youth travelers are not described as a ‘hippie’ or ‘bum’ but that they are more likely to be described as middle class or at a juncture in life (Riley, 1988, p. 326). Riley’s study has helped to change ‘the conceptualization and relatively negative connotations’ linked with “drifters” (Ateljevic & Doome, 2001, p. 172).

As early as in 1973, Cohen made a prognosis that “as drifter itineraries coagulate, a separate infrastructure serving drifter tourism gradually comes into existence” (p. 96). The saying is very much true as the backpacker tourism has boomed over the last decades. Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1995) establish a number of backpackers' characteristics including a lot of interaction with hosts, low organization, and the use of low cost, less comfortable facilities. These observable travel traits together with low average age, lack of travel structure, and a high degree of independence are together to some extent facilitate, the search for authentic travel experiences (Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995).

2.3 WWOOF and other alternative travel forms

WWOOF stands for Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms. As mentioned

earlier, WWOOF has a much longer history than helpx and Workaway, and it has a specific focus on organic farming. In the last few years, the phenomenon of WWOOF has caught several researcher's eyes and there has been a number of studies about WWOOF and WWOOFers (people who participate in WWOOF activities) worldwide, including but not limited to studies in Canada (Lans, 2016), Japan (Burns, 2015; Burns & Kondo, 2015), Columbia (Chaparro Mendivelso, Dreger, & Ospina Niño, 2016), the United States (Yamamoto & Engelsted, 2014) and Australia (Nakagawa & Nakagawa, 2017).

Ord (2010) had a survey of WWOOF farms in Canada and found out that WWOOF hosts usually receive the desired numbers of WWOOFers all year long. Ord (2010) also mentioned that many of those farms are to some extent rely on WWOOFers. Wengel, McIntosh and Cockburn-Wootten (2018) aimed to study the host-guest/helper relations and the 'tensions that may be inherent in the participants' interactions' in a case study in New Zealand (p. 47). Their research has illustrated that 'one of the consequences of a lack of ethical accountability related to the New Zealand WWOOFing experience is thus the exploitation of volunteers' labour' (Wengel, McIntosh & Cockburn-Wootten, 2018, p. 52). They also concluded that 'a win-win exchange in WWOOFing is based on mutual respect, trust, and interest in each other' (Wengel, McIntosh & Cockburn-Wootten, 2018, p. 52).

There are many other services in the travel industry also involving exchanges to different extents, for instance Airbnb, couch surfing and Home Exchange. These services provide people today with more diverse, convenient and affordable styles of travel. 'In economic terms, this type of tourism is a type of tourism that is created and enjoyed through the establishment of interpersonal relationships in which organizers are not just profit-driven, but strive to establish an atmosphere of honest and shared hospitality' (Ruisi, 2004; Forno & Garibaldi, 2015, p. 205). A study discussing Airbnb as a rising informal accommodation sector indicates that the service's appeal of Airbnb is greater among 'young, technologically comfortable, adventurous, and budget-conscious tourists' than some other tourists, who may have different concerns

such as security, quality and legitimation (Guttentag, 2015, p. 1205). Guttentag (2015) also pointed out that Airbnb will not appeal for all tourists, there are traditional tourists who still prefer to stay at hotels in primarily tourist area.

Forno & Garibaldi (2015) conducted a study about Home-Swapping in Italy. They discussed that 'home-swapping differs from more traditional travel options because they offer a high level of personalization of the tourist experience', 'based on peer-to-peer arrangements among private owners and do not involve any monetary exchange' (Forno & Garibaldi, 2015, p. 206-207). They also point out that home-swappers 'have a higher level of trust towards strangers' and 'collaborative peer-to-peer forms of tourism are founded on the principle of reciprocity and mutual collaboration' (Forno & Garibaldi, 2015, p. 207).

In some context, helpers are described as volunteers. However, I choose to not refer to volunteer literature to study this phenomenon as volunteer tourism points towards other tourism practices beyond the phenomenon I have chosen to study. In volunteer tourism studies, it can be sometimes about "organized" groups with privileges, who travel to less-developed countries and help less-privileged people. This work-accommodation exchange is not "organized" by any third party and helpers travel to developing countries as well as developed countries to seek different experiences.

I will apply Cohen's description of drifter and the aforementioned discussions of backpackers' characteristics to my later analysis. The literatures about WWOOF may have different intentions but also helped me to discuss host-helper relations in work-accommodation exchange phenomenon in my analysis. All the other extant literature regarding itinerant travel forms can be seen longitudinally through history along with the literature associated with present alternative tourism practices such as Airbnb and Home Swapping. These serve as background to this study.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter on methodology presents the logic of my research design as well as the chronological construction of my research. The purpose of my research design was to find the most suitable and effective solution for the conduct of research in order to answer my research question. That question was how do helpers ascribe meanings to the phenomenon of work-accommodation exchange?

In this chapter, first, I talk about my personal experiences as a helper and my initial incentive to conduct this research. Second, I write about my methodical approaches in detail as well as why these choices suited my needs. I explain why I chose qualitative research and why I chose semi-structured interviews as my main method of data collection. Third, I move on to how I developed my interview guide in order to generate the empirical data along with how I selected my informants. Then, I clarify some ethical issues, how I recorded and analyzed my data, and how my relationship with my informants may have influenced my interpretations.

3.2 My background as a helper

I came to Australia as a working holiday-maker in November 2015. I came across helpx in a backpacker group on social media. It was the first time I had ever heard of it. I immediately signed up to it and successfully found a host. I enjoyed it so much that I continue to travel using helpx. I have stayed with 8 hosts in Australia, 2 hosts in France and 1 host in Canada. The longest stay was about 5 weeks and the shortest was 2 nights. I have worked as a helper under very different conditions such as on a chicken farm, in a vineyard, with a retired elderly couple in a million-dollar seaside villa and with a family with small children in a self-sufficient countryside setting. I learned things that I was not able to learn at school or in my past 23 years. I also became friends with one of my hosts, and we have stayed in contact for many years. My experience with different hosts has really influenced me, transformed me and inspired me to study this phenomenon. Even though I think focusing on the hosts and

their experiences in work-accommodation exchange is very interesting, I chose to study the helpers because I am a helper myself and I am more familiar with helpers' experiences in such exchanges. Also, I have never worked as a host so far. Before I started on this Master's thesis and what I wanted to study about the helpers in this phenomenon, I took some time to reflect on my experiences as a helper, the knowledge I had acquired, the skills I had learned and how it had built up some good characteristics in me along with the friendships I had gained. I started wondering if the work-accommodation exchange experience was inspiring and helpful to other people as it was to me. Alternately, there were times when I also felt nervous, confused and exhausted due to many different reasons such as cultural shock, and unfavorable working or living conditions. I also hoped to investigate those unpleasant conditions in work-accommodation exchanges. At some work-accommodation exchange places, I came across other helpers and we worked together or collaboratively. This research was also inspired by my conversations with them and of course my interactions with hosts.

3.3 Qualitative Research

'The methodological questions cannot be reduced to a question of methods; methods must be fitted into a predetermined methodology' (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108). As Moses and Knutsen (2012) indicate, all the research designs and choices of methods 'reflect researchers' (often implicit) understandings of the nature of the world and how it should be studied' (p. 1). The philosophy backing up my research is more on the constructivist side than positivism. This is due to the focus of my research questions on the personal and interpersonal level of experiences, which are mainly subjective and socially constructed. Guba & Lincoln (1994) describe that in constructivism 'realities are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature (although elements are often shared among many individuals and even across cultures), and dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding the

constructions’(p. 110-111). With respect to above, how could I as a inquirer go about finding out how do my informants ascribe meaning to work-accommodation exchanges? These underlying understandings provide researchers with ‘the philosophical ballast to address important questions concerning the nature of truth, certainty and objectivity in a given project’ (Moses & Knutsen, 2012, p. 1). ‘Alignment between the belief system underpinning the research approach, together with the research question, are prerequisites for rigorous qualitative research’ (Arianne et al, 2015, p. 5). In this thesis, I sought helpers’ opinions about this quality that is typical for work-accommodation exchanges and makes work-accommodation exchanges different from other forms of travel. According to Eneroth (1984), ‘the purpose in qualitative research never is to measure anything’, instead ‘qualitative methods seek for a certain quality that is typical for a phenomenon or that makes the phenomenon different from others’ (Caroline, 2001, p. 551). Also, my research question led to the use of a qualitative method as it is open-ended, as well as helps to discover and develop new thoughts. In this thesis, the understanding of the phenomenon was fluid, alterable and evolved all the time based on incoming data.

As my research question was to inquire how do other helpers ascribe meanings, I believe semi-structured interviews were a suitable and effective solution to conduct the research as more information about helpers’ values, attitudes and opinions could be obtained, particularly how they explain and contextualize these issues (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Also, as the phenomenon was relatively new with a lack of literature or systematic research, based on the value of the collected data, a semi-structured interview can generate topics that suit the research interests and allow researchers to understand this phenomenon from different aspects.

Semi-structured interviews were the main method in this thesis. I also combined it with participant observation to provide supplementary data and additional help to better understand what my informants talked about in their semi-structured interviews. Considering my background as a helper, and the fact that I was working with other helpers including some of my informants, I was able to observe and collect data while

participating. Participant observation was meaningful in this thesis as 'it affords access to the work–accommodation exchange "backstage culture"; it allows for richly detailed description; and it provides opportunities for viewing or participating in unscheduled events' (De Munck & Sobo, 1998, p. 43; Kawulich, 2005). There could have been a very small part of ethnography in the thesis, however, I did not actively use ethnography in it. I did not have specific field-oriented activities, cultural patterning or interpretations but some of the underlying logics may resemble somehow ethnography, for example, being reflexive about the data collection, analysis of my data, which I return to discuss later in the ethics part of this chapter (Lambert & McCarron, 2011).

3.4 The interview guide

The process of developing the interview guide went back and forth. From time to time, I turned to literature and reflected on my own experiences to seek inspirations. Some of the questions I already had in mind such as I was interested in helpers' interpretations of the difference between work-accommodation exchange and backpackers. I also wanted to touch on their work arrangements and working conditions in work-accommodation exchanges as work is such an important part of a helper's life. Another point, I had long in mind was about vulnerability and if helpers felt vulnerable during work-accommodation exchanges and how they reacted to that and their feelings. Several questions were further developed to make the interview guide more organized as a whole. In the end, the interview consisted of seven parts and they were loosely connected topics.

The first part enabled helpers to warm up by starting to share their backgrounds as well as the forms of travel they used. The second part focused around the work element in work-accommodation exchanges with an aim to inquire about working conditions, arrangements, along with their opinions about the work element of the exchange. The third part related to mapping relations and interactions with hosts and other travelers. It included open-ended questions regarding helpers' relations with the

host, other helpers and the local community. Then came part four, which was generated from my initial motivation for this thesis and it concerned good and bad experiences that helpers had had in work-accommodation exchanges. I aimed to discover information about their good leisure times, their experience highlights and also whether at some point, they felt a sense of vulnerability—this was another big topic in this part of the interviews. Probes were used to help reflections concerning if at any point in work-accommodation exchanges the helpers felt insecure, vulnerable. Some informants did have such experiences and I then let them tell stories to contextualize these issues. Part five of the interview guide was about how helpers identified work-accommodation exchanges and how they identified helpers, especially compared to backpackers. This was inspired my former informal conversation with one of the informants, who thought he was a helper, a house guest but by no means a backpacker, which made me interested in how helpers identify themselves. Part 6 focused on the influences and gains in work-accommodation exchanges, which as I mentioned earlier was also a big initial drive for this project. I asked openly if they felt that work-accommodation exchange had somehow made any changes in their lives. I followed their answers and probed for more detail using questions to let them explain how and in what ways this was the case. The last part asked them to talk about the advantages and disadvantages of work-accommodation exchanges.

3.5 The informants

As I was working on my interview guide, I also started to look for potential informants for my interviews. I was thinking of focusing on a particular group in this phenomenon, for instance, the helpers who participated in work-accommodation exchange in Northern Norway. But I still had the thirst for helpers who had experiences elsewhere as well. As the phenomenon is worldwide and still relatively new in this field, I thought it would be useful and really serve my research interest if I listened to multiple voices in this study. Thus, I set these criteria for my informants:

regardless of their age, nationality, gender and occupation, they should have engaged in work-accommodation exchange before and had already physically left the hosts' place. My concern behind this was that it may restrain their willingness to speak up if they were currently staying with a host and it would be beneficial if they had some distance and some time to reflect on their own experiences before starting to explore meanings associated with this phenomenon. I had come across many helpers on farms since farms usually require many helpers. At each host place, helpers usually have a common Facebook group to keep in contact. Therefore, I reached out to those helpers that I used to know on Facebook, explained my research purposes and invited them to participate in my interviews. I had also met some other helpers outside farms, either in backpackers' accommodation or at school. All the informants received an information letter that stated that the participation in an interview was voluntarily, all the information would be confidential and they could withdraw their interview transcripts if and whenever they wanted. In the end, I managed to find seven informants who were willing to take part in my interviews including three males and four females, their ages ranged from 20 to 33 years. There was a mix of nationalities, specifically, China, India, Estonia, Germany, France and the UK. Respondent #2 (male, 27, India) and respondent #7 (female, 33, UK) worked together with me in a vinery. They were both experienced helpers and had stayed with more than 3 different hosts. Respondent #4 (female, 25, Estonia), respondent #5 (female, 20, Germany) and respondent #6 (male, 28, France) worked together with me on a chicken farm. Both respondents #5 and #6 worked there more than two months. I got to know Respondent #1 (male, 26, Hong Kong) through a friend and I met Respondent #3 (female, 25, mainland China) in a backpackers' hostel in Australia.

I choose to interview the informants on skype as we were not in the same locations when I conducted the interviews. For a skype meeting, it is also good to select people who already knew me as trust had already been established between us. So, I contacted them and set up a date to skype. They were informed that the interview would be recorded but that all the information would remain confidential. I also

offered to send them a copy of the thesis later by email if they were interested. Right before our skype interview, I checked my Internet connection speed and suggested my informants to similarly do so. The Internet connection was not a problem when conducting interviews. The average interview took about 60 minutes; the longest interview was 90 minutes and the shortest was about 35 minutes. I followed the interview guide and let the helpers speak up and follow their topics as much as possible. The language I used during the interview was English, with an exception of speaking mandarin with respondent #3 who shared the same first language as me.

3.6 Ethic

This research followed general procedures for ethics. First, I registered this project with the Norwegian Social Science Data Service (NSD). I stated that I would not use personal information in my thesis, and that I would keep the data safe and delete the research records once I finished my project. I told the participants in the information letter that personal information would be anonymized. The transcribed interviews were kept on my personal laptop encrypted by password access.

In practice, a researcher has ‘ethical obligations toward a research participant in terms of interacting with him or her in a humane, nonexploitative way while at the same time being mindful of one’s role as a researcher’ (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 264). I was very grateful that my informants were very open about their good and bad experiences and were willing to share these experiences with me. I understood that I should not pressure my informants in any form and especially if there were some sensitive topics they tried to avoid. If I discovered that my informants were demonstrating any sense of discomfort, I would not continue asking more about that topic. Sometimes they did admit that they had not thought about a question yet and then they paused to think about it. If they really did not have anything to say on certain topic, I would just move on to the next topic.

‘The complexity of researching private lives and placing their accounts in the public arena raises multiple issues for researchers in qualitative research that could not be solved solely by the application of abstract rules or guidance’ (Miller et.al, 2012, p. 1). I related very much to this when I conducted my interviews and analyzed the data. ‘Having shown that procedural ethics cannot in itself provide all that is needed for dealing with ethically important moments in qualitative research, we then draw on the notion of reflexivity as a resource’ (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 262) ‘Reflexivity in research is not a single or universal entity but a process—an active, ongoing process that saturates every stage of the research’ (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 274). During the interviews, I constantly reminded myself to be professional, to ask questions as a researcher, not as a old friend or an acquaintance. I was also aware that I bring my personal influences in the interpretation process though I try to be as reflexive about that as possible. Even though I used my experience actively, it did not mean getting personal or proffering my feelings to my informants. I was open to listen to their ideas and let them tell their stories. I was able to use my personal influence to advantage, as a resource to better understand helpers’ situations, and to explain how the system works, etc. I conducted the interview with respondent #3 in Mandarin but I had to transcribe it into English, which could have generated deviation. Also, for most of my informants and me, English was not our first language, and we may have had difficulty expressing ourselves at some point. While I was working on the thesis, of course, new ideas occurred and my research focus may have slightly shifted. The data that was collected for certain topics may later have generated new topics and been used in a different way for analysis. The analysis of the data was a time-consuming and messy process. I read my transcribed interviews again and again, constantly referring to concepts that I had discussed in the literature review. I became familiar with those concepts and they helped me to further develop these topics in the analysis. I had in mind to analyze in a chronological order but later I changed the structure and focused on analyzing who helpers were, work, leisure, vulnerability and post-

work-accommodation exchange experiences in order to better serve the research question.

Chapter 4 Analysis

4.1 introduction

In this chapter, the data gathered from my interviews is presented. My interviews were meant to find out how do helpers describe work-accommodation exchanges after being a helper. My analysis begins with a general discussion of who the helpers are as I try to capture some of their potential characteristics. Then I raise some other issues that I consider worth mentioning. I focus on the actual work in work-accommodation exchanges; I portray actual scenes of helpers working and thereby illustrate what it is like to work as a helper. Then, I further analyze how helpers identify the work element in work-accommodation exchanges. Later, I move on to leisure and the activities they do together with hosts. Next, I discuss vulnerability in work-accommodation exchanges. This provides a closer look at the dynamics of the temporarily established host-helper relationship between those two parties. Afterwards, I analyze post-work and accommodation exchange experiences, namely what kinds of influences helpers receive from work-accommodation exchanges. Finally, I provide an analytical discussion and compare work-accommodation exchange as a phenomenon with other itinerant travel forms mentioned earlier in the literature review. There are many antecedents that work-accommodation exchange receives from these forms of travel yet there are still differences between them.

4.2 Helpers: who they are

Before I discuss how the phenomenon is seen from the helpers' side, I want to first discuss who those helpers are. One of the characteristics of helpers is that the majority of helpers are millennials and post-millennials, which means that they were born in the late 1980s and 1990s. Most of the helpers are in their 20s when they come across work-accommodation exchange. They are from the generation that simultaneously grew up with the development of the Internet and information technology. They have had more access to information on foreign countries and exotic cultures at a much younger age compared to previous generations. They turn to travel technology namely

social media and budget-travel tools like Skyscanner, Airbnb, Couchsurfing, and Lonely Planet message boards instead of travel advisors or travel agencies (Machado, 2014). For example, Instagram has made wanderlust contagious, ‘based on a quick search, there are currently 300,000,000 posts tagged with the word “travel” (Fromm, 2018, p. 3). Many millennials and post-millennials feel like there is little reason to wait until their golden years to see the world, this may influence their need for more spontaneous, more authentic and penetrating ways of traveling in their 20s.

My respondents’ ages ranged from 20 to 33 years. Respondent #5 was the youngest, at an age of 20 years and was about to begin her study in the university; while respondent #7 was 33 years old, and was taking a vacation from work and considering quitting her job. Respondent #1 and #3 had just finished their Bachelor studies when they chose to become helpers; respondent #2 and #4 had just completed their Master studies; respondent #5 had just finished her high school studies. Respondent #6 and respondent #7 were at a stage where they were tired of their old jobs and were in search of more exciting, challenging, new careers. It is not hard to see that many of the helpers were between studies or between jobs or about to start working.

Given that background, I see another characteristic among helpers, which is that many of them are at a turning point in their lives, a junction point between two stages of their lives. My selected informants underpin this characteristic. This is also consistent with Riley’s (1988) description of budget travelers as mentioned earlier. Riley (1988) also describes it as a type of *rite of passage* of self-testing tourism. ‘The traveler, by exposing himself to new situations and challenges, is testing his abilities and limits; this testing of the self may help him to transcend those limits’ (Vogt, 1976, p.32). Work-accommodation exchanges could also be seen as self-testing experiences for those helpers. Many of the helpers were not sure what to do next with their lives so they wanted to spend some time doing work-accommodation exchanges where they can test themselves and try out different work, experience different lifestyles and meet different hosts. Hopefully, the whole adventure would somehow lead them or inspire them for their next stage of life. Respondent #6 worked as a crane driver in France

and he wanted to get a different job but he did not know what to do. So, he and his brother quit their jobs and travelled to Australia. He wanted to find out what kind of careers he should pursue by traveling. He talked to his hosts and other helpers about the work condition in different industries. Similar to respondent # 6, respondent #1 was also testing out if he wanted to be a tour guide in his future. Part of his tasks for his host was working as a guide for Chinese speaking tourists. He was experiencing and trying out different roles. The experiences he gained from work-accommodation exchange was crucial for his later decision to enroll in further studies in tourism. This also demonstrates that helpers might have a well-defined purpose when they do work-accommodation exchange as opposed to drifters. In the later analytical discussion, I will come back to discuss how this opposes Cohen's description of drifters. Another possible reason why these people, who were at crossroads in their lives, chose to do work-accommodation exchange was that they had the time yet not the money. Many of them were between jobs or studies and they did not have a fixed income, which meant that they had a lot of time but very little money. In this case, if they still wanted to travel, work-accommodation exchange was a good economic alternative for them since it lets them use their labor in exchange for room and board.

Another interesting trait of the helpers is that unlike backpackers where the western youth are the mainstream, among the helpers, there were many from Asia and South America. Before the 2000s, Asians backpackers were 'a rarity and the practice was viewed as an activity directly associated with Europeans and Americans' (Noy 2004; Westerhausen 2002; Teo, 2006, p. 110). In the last few years, there are also many Asians among working holiday-makers. Similarly, there are plenty of Asian helpers in the work-accommodation exchange world. Many of them are from China, India, Japan and South Korea. And I think one of the reasons behind that is the economic development in those countries. For example, 'in less than two decades China has grown from travel minnows to the world's most powerful outbound market' as more and more Chinese families can now afford to travel abroad (Smith, 2018, p. 2). Another reason could be it has been easier for them to apply for visitor visa or

working holiday visas so the youth have better mobility. For example, in 2015, Australia announced it would provide 5,000 working holiday visa quotas for Chinese citizens aged between 18 and 30 so that they can work and travel in Australia for 12 months. Thus, in 2015, I was, as were other youth, able to apply for and receive a working holiday visa to travel and work as a helper myself.

Some Asian helpers come from middle class families or well-educated families in their home countries. These helpers are seeking authentic and spontaneous experiences and variety most likely evident in western countries. Respondent #1 was from Hong Kong and his parents were professors in a university. He said his parents were very supportive of his travel and from time to time offered him financial help. Respondent #2 was from India and his parents were running a paint business and his family was above middle-class ranking in their city. He commented that after his current long period of traveling that he would go back to India and take over the family business. Respondent # 3 was from mainland China, after 2 years of traveling in Australia and New Zealand, she will apply to enroll in a Master's program of study in Australia. Her family will pay for her tuition fees. For these three helpers, their families were very supportive and they could turn to their respective families for financial help as the helpers did not have fixed incomes themselves. However, they preferred not to spend their parents' money for their travel unless they did not have any other choices. To them, travel was seen as something extra than study, something for which you should pay for yourself. The work-accommodation exchange system helped them save a lot of money on accommodation. Therefore, it became possible for them to travel. In the future, the number of Asian helpers may be even bigger as nowadays more and more youth do not have pressure to earn money right after graduation and they have the freedom to see the world before settling down.

Cohen characterized the drifters as “predominantly a child of affluence on a prolonged moratorium from adult, middle-class responsibility, seeking spontaneous experiences in the excitement of complete strangeness” (E. Cohen, 1973, p. 89). It is difficult to establish to which social class or social background the helpers belonged.

With the appearance of low-cost airlines, budget accommodations and alternatives like Airbnb, travel became easier than ever. So that more and more people can afford to travel. In general, the contemporary helpers are of a more heterogeneous origin than drifters.

So, to sum it up, it shows that some helpers can be characterized as young (mostly millennials), at a junction in their lives, and they come from families upon which they are not reliant for financial help to live. Quite a few helpers are from Western countries, but there are helpers from other parts of the worlds such as Asians.

4.3 Work

Work is an important component in work-accommodation exchange. It is one of the foundations of the exchange as it serves as comparable benefits from helpers to hosts. Work is what hosts need and it is one of the main reasons that they are willing to host completely strangers. Work is the important link that makes the whole thing functional, reciprocal, relatively fair and sustainable. In this section, I aim to gain a deeper understanding of the work element in work-accommodation exchange and discover how helpers describe the work element in work-accommodation exchange. I want to first portray scenes of helpers working and illustrate what it is like to work as a helper. Then, I discuss how helpers perceive the work element in work-accommodation exchange by asking how they interpret the fact that they have to work while traveling. The second point in this section, I want to compare work-accommodation exchange with backpacking and analyze how helpers distinguish between the two.

Helpers have to earn their room and board through work since there is an exchange relationship between helpers and hosts. The most common deal is to work four to five hours a day, five days a week in exchange for room and board for a week. Many hosts are more flexible with the hours, but there is no doubt that helpers have to bring a certain amount of value through working for the hosts. Work can be diverse and

situations vary. Of course, the majority is labor work such as housekeeping, weeding, gardening.

For respondent #4, the work arrangement at an inland Australian chicken farm was three or four hours in the morning and two or three hours in the afternoon, five days a week. Respondent #4 had worked two and half months there. She recalled that in the mornings, she would do some odd jobs such as digging or fertilizing soil and then pick up eggs with other helpers. In the afternoon, she was either picking eggs again or washing and packing eggs in the egg shack. The egg picking was easy yet relatively dirty work. While chasing away the hens, helpers have to pick up all the eggs quickly. It is common that there is blood, and excrement left on the eggs. Sometimes dying chickens are on the ground due to the heat, helpers have to take care of them as well. At the same time, they have to shovel and add fresh hay. She was working with others all the time and the work was highly repetitive. She admitted that sometimes it was boring to just repeat the tasks day after day, but she always had some company. It was also outdoors and the temperature was around 40 degrees Celsius during the day in that area. I asked if she liked the work, she thought the work was fine and sometimes entertaining. She loved working with animals, and interacting with chicken and farm dogs made her feel entertained. She said that she gets very tired after work and always sleeps very well. She thought the work itself was by no means exhausting, but the weather was too extreme. All in all, she thought the work was well organized and fair, and the work-accommodation exchange was perfectly functional at that place.

For respondent #7, her work was pruning vines for six to seven hours from 5 am to midday regardless of the weather. Helpers usually started early to avoid the heat in the afternoon. She was doing the same job of pruning for the entire time. In the early morning, there is a lot of dew on the vines. Despite helpers wearing gloves, hands get soaked in no time. When it is raining, the work has to carry on. Hands are sometimes wet and numb after a few hours. There are many insects in the field and the nearest toilet is 1.5 km away. She was working with others in the same fields but different lines. She recalled that the host would come and check her work from time to time. And, helpers

could feel free to take a break anytime they wanted if it was not too often. She also thought the work was very well informed and organized. She liked that it was outdoors but hated that it was highly repetitive. I asked if she liked the work arrangement, she said it was fine. Although waking up early and working long hours in the morning, she could have the whole afternoon and evening free.

I have worked in those two places myself as a helper. I worked two weeks on the chicken farm and two weeks in the vineyard. Neither of the two types of works were extremely heavy but both required working outdoors in unpleasant conditions, namely heat on the farm and raining in the vineyard. These are two portraits of what work can be like in work-accommodation exchanges. It is noted that the work arrangement can be different and not confined to farm work. In many other cases, especially, at homestays, the work is less routine and more tailored to the hosts.

Different to previous forms of travel that the helpers had experienced, work had now become an essential part of their lives. What does it mean to work several hours a day while traveling? How do helpers like the work and travel combination?

Respondent #5 traveled to Australia after graduating high school. She had 2,000 AUD in her pocket and she was about to begin a whole year of adventure. Her plan was to work as a fruit picker for 6 months and then drive around Australia for another 6 months. She soon found out that it was not that easy to find paid fruit picking jobs during that time of the year. Then she started to do work-accommodation exchanges since for her the biggest expense was housing. For her, working as a helper was a temporary alternative to save housing expenses in a transition period. She thought working five or six hours was quite okay especially since she had nothing else to do on the isolated farm. She thought that “working while traveling is practical and you will of course have some obstacles but eventually you will overcome them.” For respondent #5, the primary concern was economic. Work-accommodation exchange may not be her first choice if she had other options. She still preferred making money and then spending it on a party or a road trip with friends. The in-depth culture safari

and connections made with others were not what she looked for in the first place.

For respondent #1, work-accommodation exchange makes travel possible for him. Respondent #1 had just finished his Bachelor studies in the U.K. and his parents in Hong Kong had sponsored him. He was aware of the fact that his parents had spent a great amount of money on him and he was very eager to become economically independent but at the same time he also wanted to travel more. He was very happy to work five or six hours during the day or at night to support his travel. He was young and energetic and eager to make efforts for the hosts. He thought the work element was meaningful and educational in his travel. Through work, he deepened his relationship with the host family and gained a sense of accomplishment.

Respondent #2 thought work-accommodation exchange was a good opportunity to gain some different work experiences. He admitted that he did not like working in the vinery but at the same time he did like talking about and tasting wine there. He disliked working long hours in the field and he admitted that he sometimes felt dizzy and had to take a nap. But he would work in the afternoon instead. He thought working and traveling were a good combination. He learned skills and knowledge about plantations and he valued and considered them useful and handy. He said that he had to go back to India and take over the family business after traveling. The things that he learnt from working may be helpful.

Respondent #7 specially commented that she chose work-accommodation exchange because she thinks it is a bit boring to just travel and have fun. She likes adding some work element into her travel so she does not get bored. For her, the work part was a necessary supplement to her travel and sightseeing experience. At least in some areas of tourism, it shows that tourists are 'seeking to be doing something in the places they visit rather than just being endlessly spectatorial and passive' (Franklin & Crang, 2001, p.13).

According to the above, some informants described that work was an important part of their travel as it helped to keep them going financially, several hours of work a day

was fair and a good arrangement for them. Although work is not the part they liked the most about work-accommodation exchange, most of them agreed that it was essential and they were happy to work in work-accommodation exchanges.

As we have mentioned earlier, backpacking was once seen as alternative tourism and has been defined as ‘small-scale, having more local opportunities for employment, less economic leakages and overall less negative impacts’ (Hampton, 1998, p. 641). Backpackers’ roles have been widened and the boundary between backpackers and other forms of travel for instance working holiday-makers seems to be more blurred than ever. They can be working holiday-makers/ backpackers/ Airbnb guests/ helpers/ travel vloggers at the same time. I was interested in if my informants identified themselves as backpackers.

Respondent #2 considered himself as a helper, a guest and a friend of the host yet he emphasized that he was by no means a backpacker because he did not have a backpack. So, for him, the mandatory work element was not what distinguished helpers from backpackers instead the physical form of a backpack was essential. He thought they were two different forms of travel. When I talked to him, I could see that he was deeply concerned about it and it was of great importance for him to not be categorized as a backpacker. We can guess it had something to do with exclusiveness. Because backpacking emerged much earlier among western countries and had a larger group. So, it is possible that for some helpers like him to perceive work-accommodation exchange as more exclusive and non-westernized concept. It is recognized by some people as a more open and more than western way of traveling.

Respondent #3 thought backpackers can choose to do work-accommodation exchange but not all the helpers are necessarily backpackers. She was from China and she interpreted that “backpacking is a more westernized concept, I would associate it with more adventurous, fun-seeking experiences, for example I think they will be interested in hitchhiking and couchsurfing. Not all the helpers are necessary backpackers, since many of them carry big suitcases and they want to have some

comfort staying at nice places and those activities (hitchhiking and couchsurfing) are too risky for them.” I asked her why she thought hitchhiking and couchsurfing were riskier than work-accommodation exchanges even though clearly, they both involve interactions with strangers. She thought that the work element was what distinguished them. She thought that work-accommodation exchange was a relatively fair exchange relationship since helpers worked for their hosts. While the other two do not have the work element so the relationship is more uneven and riskier. The work element does differentiate work-accommodation exchange from couchsurfing and provides a fair basis for the two parties.

In sum, this discussion shows that work-accommodation exchange is based on a relatively fair exchange relationship and reciprocity, which makes work-accommodation exchange sustainable and more acceptable by people. From the beginning, backpacking has been a westernized concept and some helpers like to distinguish themselves from backpackers. Those helpers see work-accommodation exchange as a more exclusive and smaller group of people having less risky cultural exchange experiences when working for a host as part of the experience.

4.4 Leisure or subsidiary leisure

Work is a very big part of work-accommodation exchange, however, not all of it. We should not undermine the significance of leisure in work-accommodation exchanges. In this section, I present information about helpers’ leisure time as opposed to working for their hosts, and I discuss how helpers obtain unique activities and experiences from work-accommodation exchanges. I also touch on helpers’ expectations regarding leisure activities at their hosts’ locations and their time spent in nature or in the wilderness. Sometimes their hosts play the role of local guides, which could also be seen as helpers’ privileges.

One of the most striking characteristics of the narratives of the respondents is that they invariably affirmed that they had some extraordinary experiences as a result of

work-accommodation exchanges. According to the respondents, some of those experiences were markedly meaningful, worth showing off and made a good story when sharing with others. Respondent #3 was still excited when she talked about her work on an alpaca farm in New Zealand. Her job was to clean for the alpacas. She studied agriculture in China and she had learnt about alpaca fleece using books. Now she had the chance to see them in person. And, she took a lot of photos and videos of alpacas during and after work. She thought it was a very cool thing to share the photos on social media especially since not many people are familiar with alpacas in China. She proudly told me that 15,000 people liked her post. She joked that this experience made her “feel like an e-celebrity”. She thought it was definitely something compelling and worthy of showing off, as she said that “not everyone has the chance to do it after all”. It is not uncommon for people to post their travel experiences; however, most people post about their comfort, luxury hotels and breathtaking views. When people post pictures of themselves cleaning stool, it is something else. Yet, it is still something people would like to see and follow. ‘Wildlife or animals as a subset of natural surroundings are assumed to be attractive to tourists’ (Franklin & Crang, 2001, p.16). To her, the popularity she received from posting her work-accommodation exchange experience on the alpaca farm constituted a more exhilarating experience. As mentioned earlier, the helpers rely on travel technology such as social media to collect information, and, at the same time, they are also sharing their experiences to ‘a future audience back home, the one they hope to impress and amuse’ (Franklin & Crang, 2001, p.16).

Yet, as significant as these experiences may be, some helpers say that these experiences were not expected from the start. This made me interested in helpers’ expectations of leisure or activities during work-accommodation exchanges. Do they expect to have leisure time? It makes sense that when helpers come to a place that they would be looking forward to taking part in local activities and having fun as locals. They may also aim to go sightseeing in their free time. Do they expect the host to take them or do they expect to go by themselves? Respondent #5 said she did not expect to have leisure

activities before she came to the chicken farm. She thought she would have to pay for other activities. So, she was extremely happy when the host took her hunting foxes for free. Respondent #2 said that he did not count on his hosts to take him sightseeing and he was happy that his host suggested to him to take the ferry to a nearby island on his free day. His host drove him to the tourist office and helped him buy the ferry tickets in advance. He went on an adventure on his own on his free day. It is not difficult to see that to some helpers, their expectation of leisure or activities at the hosts' locations were quite low. They do not ostensibly expect their hosts to arrange any sort of activities. And, some helpers were willing to pay extra for other touristic experiences. So, in helpers' minds, the work they do is in exchange for the accommodation and the food. If other activities come along, then helpers consider it as an inviting gesture from their hosts and feel grateful for the hosts' kindness.

When asked about their most memorable experiences in work-accommodation exchange, many of them spoke about their experiences in nature:

“That night, the northern light was extremely bright. I walked there and watched the northern light. When I set the tripod up and took pictures with my camera, I looked up; it was so pretty. It was so colorful - white, yellow and pink auroras, it looks like a spirit across the sky. It danced, and I felt like it was saying hi to me, and then, it disappeared. The whole experience was less than 30 seconds.” (Respondent #1)

“The most memorable was in Pemberton, a small town in Western Australia. I stayed with my hosts deep in the forest. It is very isolated from the outside world. There are so many giant karri trees in that region and it was so amazing. I felt like I was walking in movie scenes. I had never seen anything like that. On my free day, my host took me to the heartbreak trail. We had a nice walk and it was just so relaxing and sensational.” (Respondent #4)

Like respondent #1 and respondent #4, some believe that the distinctively beautiful

nature they came across when working as a helper was indeed sensational, a highlight of their journey. And, they suggested that while they were being exposed to “raw” nature, they knew that they were in good hands. Namely, they were with someone (the host) who knew the area very well, who was a catalyst for this process, which consequently made the experience more leisurely and carefree. Respondent #4 spotted a dead snake in the middle of the forest trail and her host was able to warn her that it was a life-threatening snake. She said: “I was more excited than scared, I took a picture of the dead snake.” Obviously respondent #4 was not so scared since she took a picture of the dead snake. It would be different if she was not with her host, who was very knowledgeable and had lots of experiences in the area. Respondent #2 said that his host introduced him to a lot of interesting facts concerning the neighborhood, which he would not have learned if he came there as a mainstream tourist. The value of hosts being local guides for helpers is underestimated. Hosts offer helpers useful local information about transportation, where to go for sightseeing as well as some local, favorite spots and activities. And in some relatively rural or isolated area, it is crucial to have access to important local information to keep helpers safe. Staying with a local family and getting first hand local news and knowledge of the area can be seen as a privilege that mainstream tourists do not receive.

4.5 Vulnerability

‘Pearsall (2002, p.1608) defined ‘being vulnerable as being exposed to being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally’, whereas Sykes (1982, p. 1205) defined it as ‘that which may be wounded, susceptible of injury, exposed to damage by weapon, criticism’ (Heaslip, 2015. p. 19). Feeling uncomfortable or vulnerable is a possible aspect of doing work-accommodation exchange, I include this part in order to present a more comprehensive, more dimensional picture of what it is like to be a helper so that readers can have a sense of the dynamics in work-accommodation exchanges. In this section, I aim to portray scenes when helpers were in uncomfortable situations and retell how they felt during those moments. I also write about how they coped with those

situations and their current attitudes toward such incidents. Work, leisure, having conversations with hosts are the norms, however, feeling vulnerable is actually not that unusual.

‘The scientific use of the term vulnerability is rooted in geography (Füssel, 2007, p. 1608) , natural hazards research (Galea, Nandi, & Vlahov, 2005), however, the use of the concept of vulnerability has expanded and become central to multiple fields such as ecology, poverty and development as well as health’ (Heaslip, 2015, p. 20). Vulnerability is such a dynamic concept and it is used in tourism as well. ‘It is, therefore, a key concept for professional practice; however this complex, elusive phenomenon is ill defined within the literature’ (Heaslip, 2015. p. 3).

When tourists are in novel environment, they are also exposed to potential danger and risk. Tourists can be seen as “easy targets” for criminals due to the reasons that tourists typically carry a lot of cash; consume alcohol and entertainment activities; have little understanding of local customs; have language barriers (Lepp & Gibson, 2003, p. 608 ; Pizam, Tarlow, & Bloom, 1997). As mentioned earlier, drifter and backpackers are interested in high novelty and low familiarity. At such, risk and adventure play a big part in the construction of backpacker identity. Work-accommodation exchange could also be seen as a high-risk practice as it also has a high level of novelty especially involving living in strangers’ homes. I will touch on several aspects, which could lead to vulnerabilities in work-accommodation exchanges.

a. unfamiliarity

Working and living in strangers’ places means that helpers are exposed to unfamiliar environments and foreign cultures, which sometimes can be overwhelming or can result in a sentiment of uneasiness. Respondent #5 recalls that one night the chicken farm was without electricity. The house was dark, hot and damp, and she was sweating all the time. She started to think about the shortage of water, Internet and electricity and how remote she was on this planet and so far away from her family. Then she became very emotional. The last straw was that she could feel her sweat running down her belly and she hated the sticky feeling and she could not stand it

anymore, she started to weep. She asked herself why she had come to this foreign country to engage in this (work-accommodation exchange), she wished she was home. The unfamiliar desert climate and the off-grid lifestyle were overwhelming to her and generated a sense of vulnerability. She questioned her choice of signing up for work-accommodation exchange and coming to this desert farm. She had this breakdown and she felt vulnerable at that moment. Now, when she recalls it, she just laughs about it. She sees it as part of the adventure and she wants to go back again in the future.

Respondent #4 had an experience at a host place where she sneaked out to buy snacks after dinner. She did this because the host's lifestyle was different from hers. The host merely ate organic food therefore the food was pricey and delicate but always in very small portions. She worked hard during the day; the food the host provided was just simply not enough. In addition, the host had strict rules about using the kitchen. With these rules, she could not really cook for herself. She thought that the condition was not very favorable. She remembered that one day the lunch was just a pinch of spaghetti with some minced garlic and organic olive oil. She felt very aggrieved but she did not have the courage to say anything to her host. Now, when she talks about it, she says that she wished she had had the courage to speak up for herself and just talk to the host. This experience taught her a lesson. She also thinks she will be more assertive and take care of her own needs if she is in a similar situation in the future.

The two mentioned situations are not rare in work-accommodation exchanges. Helpers come to unfamiliar environments, and, learning to embrace different lifestyles is definitely a move out of comfort zones. So, it is possible that sometimes they may not be able to do their laundry, and some places have limited Wi-Fi. Of course, sometimes, this kind of situation will be mentioned on the hosts' profile although not every host will mention them. Most of the time, the host schedules meal-times and work times. Outside the house, there is unfamiliarity as well. In many cases, they may not speak the local language and are highly reliant on their hosts or other helpers to interpret for them. When hosts' places are very remote, the helpers may not have the

mobility to travel to other places and the helpers may have to stay at the hosts' houses after work. Such possibilities have the potential to lead to a sense of vulnerability.

Some of the helpers felt that they hardly had time on their own when joining a host family. This lack of privacy can lead to vulnerability. Respondent #7 had been living alone for many years. She admitted that when she was with a warm-hearted host with whom she shared three meals a day, she sometimes felt that she would prefer to have more privacy and eat alone. She did not dislike eating together and having conversation at the dinner table but she felt reluctant to have all three meals together all the time. She considered it stepping out of her comfort zone and in doing so she was sometimes in an uncomfortable condition. Sharing living spaces with complete strangers is part of work-accommodation exchange life. Helpers sometimes struggle keeping balance between fitting in with the host family and having some privacy for themselves.

b. gender

'It has been discussed that gender roles have shaped and will shape farm tourism' (Caballé, 1999, p. 245). This gender-based nuance is also noted in work-accommodation exchange as some respondents mentioned that sometimes being female meant extra care and attention and as a result may increase a feeling of vulnerability. Women helpers mentioned that they remained alert when entering strangers' homes, especially, if there was a male host. While there are gender-based nuances in the perceptions of danger associated with staying with new host families, specifically, female helpers perceive greater risks. However, this was not consistent among those interviewed. There were other elements such as personality type that could also be important with regard to an individual's perception of danger in work-accommodation exchange. Respondent #7 had encountered a male host who liked making dirty jokes and this made her extremely uncomfortable and disgusted. Respondent #4, herself, was not mindful of gender differences in work-accommodation exchange. But once she had to live with only the husband in this host family's home for a few days and the wife in the family asked if she was

comfortable with that. The wife in the family also emphasized that her husband was a very respectful and kind person. The wife in the host family was highly aware of gender-based concerns. In continuing interviewing respondent #4, I noticed that to her and to many others, being a female helper could sometimes cause extra concerns. However, this did not stop them doing work-accommodation exchanges. Instead, they utilized risk-reducing strategies and calculated the risks while traveling from which they gained a sense of empowerment and strength. Respondent #4 said that many hosts described her as brave and inquisitive. She was not aware that being a female and traveling to strangers' homes was an act of courage. But she was aware that she was using common sense to protect herself all the time.

c. miscommunication

I have been musing over all the transactions that respondents described in the previous interviews and my former experiences. And I find that when the transaction between the host and helper is not effective or as functional as they might be, the helper tends to feel a sense of vulnerability. Sometimes due to misunderstanding or miscommunication, the host himself/herself could be the reason that helpers felt unsettled and/or insecure. Respondent #6 shared his experiences:

“It was not vulnerable, more like uncomfortable to me. The host kept knocking on my door and asked me to help with her cooking. It was not my work. I worked five to six hours in her garden already and I could really use some time myself. But she made it very difficult to say no to her. She told me something about another French helper who was there and simply stayed in his room playing video games not helping with the cooking and cleaning processes of three meals. She said this is a family experience and I should take part in everything as a family member. That was not fair cause I felt like I had to work so much extra. I mean it is not like I am super-selfish. I help a lot with other hosts if they treat me very well and I want to help. It is no problem. But that host was asking too much.”

(Respondent #6)

In this case, respondent #6 said that after being asked to help with cooking, he was

reluctant to refuse. He did not want to help with the cooking, especially because he thought he had worked enough that day and wanted some time for himself. In his opinion, his five to six hours of work should be enough in exchange for his food and accommodation. He held the sentiment that the host was asking too much. On the other side, the host claimed to offer a family experience and the helper should take responsibilities like a family member. A family member should not calculate the gains and losses all the time. When both sides have different expectations and they want the other party to comply with their standards, neither of them will feel very satisfied and they will probably feel that they are being taken advantage of. In a situation like this, the helper is in a more vulnerable position than the host, so the most likely scenario will be the helper does as the host wants even though he/she is unwilling to do so.

The informants noted that working and living in a host's place is not always easy. Helpers may feel vulnerable sometimes because in this setting, there is no doubt that there is unequal power relation between the host and the helper. However, many of the helpers do not address the issue of power, in this case it means what kind of work needs to be done and how much time needs to be spent on that work, as well as rights and interests. Many people come into work-accommodation exchange and they are reluctant to talk about specific work arrangements with the host because they assume it is standard but it is actually not. Respondent #4 recalled that she normally would not talk about work, accommodation and food details with the host before arrival because she felt that she was not in a position to make requests or negotiate. She felt that she had the right to ask the questions but she felt uncomfortable to ask for anything more than what her hosts offered her. Of course, there is a power shift when the helpers have a higher mobility, like when the place is very easy to get around or the helpers have a car. Then they will be most likely to leave the host's place anytime they want. When they sense a little unfairness, or it is different from what the host put on the profile or simply because they are unhappy or dissatisfied, they may leave without informing the host. This is not good for the host as the host may have prepared for the helpers' coming and could really use their help. I think one of the

fundamental things hosts and helpers should have in common is that they should look at the issues through the lens of the exchange relationship, not just through one's own eyes.

d. peer pressure

Transactions with the host may not be the only element that results in vulnerability. It may arise through the actions of other helpers, sometimes, there is peer pressure. When pressured by fellow helpers, we may make suboptimal decisions and make ourselves uncomfortable. I remember my first day working as a helper in the vinery; I was shocked that my fellow helpers suggested to me to urinate in the bush. According to a male helper, the reasons behind that was it is time-saving and convenient as the bathroom was 1.5 km away from the field. Then, another girl told me the same thing, she said she always did it in the bush. I was shocked and did not know what to do. It may take 15 minutes to go to the cellar and back and I wasn't sure how my host would react if I disappear for 15 minutes taking care of my basic physiological needs. There were 100 different variables going through my head and I did feel very vulnerable. This problem was not solved until two days later when a new girl came and she was also against urinating in the bush so we then were able to walk back to the wine cellar together. Now that I think of this series of transactions in that field, I can still recall how insecure, confused I was. This is just a small glimpse of what vulnerability means in doing work-accommodation exchange.

Finally, conclusions can be formulated from the preceding discussions. Some helpers could easily feel vulnerable in work-accommodation exchange settings due to unfamiliarity, miscommunication, gender and peer pressure. And every helper can be potentially exposed to an intense number of things with which they are not familiar or comfortable. Good communication with the host before arrival is crucial. It is important to talk about work and living arrangements beforehand.

4.6 Post- work & accommodation exchange

In this section, I aim to discuss what could happen between hosts and helpers after

exchanges, the quality of the exchange relationship, and subsequently, where that may lead. In interviews, I asked about helpers' contact with hosts after work-accommodation exchange were completed such as if there was any sort of input they made having been helpers to keep contacts with hosts. These questions were meant to gain insight into understanding the quality of their relationships and the possibility of building long-term relationships in work-accommodation exchanges. Then, one of my biggest interests was about their gains from doing so or the impacts or influences they experienced. I asked specifically about how they perceived if working as a helper had any kinds of influences on them and further I asked if the function of being a helper lead to any sorts of self-changes or other changes in their lives.

a. long-lasting relationship

Helpers live and work with hosts for a while and there is a chance that they could become friends. Based on my former experiences as a helper, I have been writing emails to a host family for three years. They were my former hosts, but later became my friends and important people in my life. They have helped with my later travels and introduced me to their friends who have also hosted me. I revisited them and they treated me as a family friend. My experience shows that it is possible to build strong lasting relationships in a very short time during work-accommodation exchanges. My interests in this is to highlight how the relationship between the two parties develops and whether they stay in touch or become strangers again.

Respondent # 5 talks about how she has made many friends via work-accommodation exchanges and she keeps in contact with them via Facebook. She also has built up a more in-depth relationship with a farmstay family in Australia. She had stayed with the family for 3 months and now she refers them as her "Australian mom and dad". She talks to them on a weekly basis and sends postcards and gifts to them from time to time. This case once again shows that there are possibilities for helpers and hosts to develop meaningful long-term social relationships.

Nevertheless, it is not the case that every helper and host gets along or become friends.

A great amount of them do not keep in touch at all. Respondent #2 explains why he did not keep in contact with a host family: “We had very little in common and I cannot think of any reasons that I would contact them after I left their place.” Yet he has also become friends with other helpers and he values those friendships.

b. Influences

This section touches on the influences and self-changes that are exhibited in and through the questions asked directly in my interviews. These influences play a role in the construction of work-accommodation exchange identities. It is not hard to notice that after asking if the experience has had an impact in their lives, some respondents answered yes without even thinking about it. They acknowledged the positive influences of doing so and they thought it influenced in many different ways.

Respondent #2 and respondent #4 answered that it had broaden their horizons and they learned some new things. Respondent #2 learnt knowledge about wine tasting and also about viticulture. After working in the vinery for a month, he said “I feel confident to talk about wine with most people now.” He learnt about wine in a very intensive way, he said the hosts talked about wine every day in the field and on the dinner table. Respondent #1 and respondent #2 affirmed that it had developed their abilities to behave in another culture. Respondent # 2 also pointed out that interacting with people from another culture was not easy, “I’m Indian and they (the hosts) were French, both are very strong cultures with a lot of traditions, a lot of culture from the past. It is very difficult to break that Indian way of thinking and for the French to break the French way of thinking and then to work and live together. But if you do that you will see something extraordinary.” He mentions that the Indian and French cultures are very different, and for them to really get to know another person and learn their culture is not easy. Work-accommodation exchange offered him a closer chance to scrutinize how other people lived their lives, and for him to be free of old ways of thinking and to try to understand things from another point of view.

Another influence respondent mentioned was language learning. As mentioned, in Workaway’s official website, Workaway offers a related first-language language

speaking environment for language learners. The language learning environment is of course reinforced. Respondent #5 admitted that he had learned English throughout his experience, “I had to speak English and I learned so much”. As for respondent #1, it turns out getting the chance to practice his language also built his confidence. He said, “Now I feel more confident about speaking English. I know I don’t have to be perfect. Others will respect you when you try to express yourself.” Respondent #7 described it like this, “Because it feels like something brave you do. It does build your confidence.”

Based on the respondent’s answer and my former experience, another interesting influence of work-accommodation exchange is that you spend so much time with yourself, doing things that you do not normally have chances to do. You may eventually learn new things about yourself. Respondent #3 shared her thoughts on this:

“I had more time focusing on myself. I observed how I act when I communicate with others, how I treat others and how I react to their behaviors. Sometimes, I feel happy and satisfied about myself. Sometimes, I instantly regret what I said or what I did. This kind of reflection helped me know myself better, what I am good at and what I need to improve.” (Respondent #3)

Another fascinating advantage from working as a helper is that you have the chance to scrutinize how other people live their lives. It is a huge insight into somebody’s life. You are able to have first-hand information on how they cook, work and interact with others and etc. This may help you to reflect on your own life and realize there are other possibilities and choices. Respondent #7 also commented that “it is always good to see how other people live and be reminded of all kinds of different things people do and all kinds of different lifestyles people have.” Respondent #3 reflected on something else, she thought her stays with different families inspired her to have a healthier diet. It really rings the bell for her since she sees how people with different diets end up with different health conditions. Our choice of food is an essential part of our lifestyle. To respondent #3, working as a helper is not just a try-on of different jobs, it is also a food tour. She has tried different foods in different families. And even though she may learn

it before and now when she sees it with her own eyes, it really touches her. With that in mind, work-accommodation exchange offers her a chance to take a dip into various cultures and become more cosmopolitan.

Additionally, some respondents discovered something new for their future career or life path. Respondent #6 thought work-accommodation exchange more or less helped her make up her mind to be a vet, and spending time with all the animals on the farm was a catalyst for that decision. Respondent #5 also developed some ideas about how she wants to live her life. Respondent #7 has a vision of her future self as working in a university, working as a helper brought her some new thoughts. Now, she is considering working as a free-lancer and planting her own food as a way of living for her. She also said she learned some useful things about farming and building tiny houses about which she wants to learn more. In her case, work-accommodation exchange offered her a chance to live with people, who had a very off-grid way of living and it opened another door for her.

Respondent #5 also mentioned that it blew his mind to learn that the farm he was working at was completely run by helpers or WWOOFers. The host of the farm only comes to pick up the eggs and sells them in the farmers market. From Monday to Friday, he has another job in the city. “That is so creative! Let the helpers do all the work. I really didn’t think that would work until I saw it with my own eyes.” He was surprised by his host’s lifestyle and how smart everything was organized. He also admitted that this might affect his future career and plans. He does not know how it will influence it, but he says he can “sense the influences”.

4.7 Antecedents and new trends

In the history of itinerant travel, several forms of itinerant travel can be classified as antecedents to today’s phenomenon of work-accommodation exchange.

a. drifters

As mentioned in the literature review, Cohen has proposed a distinction between

various types of tourists ranging from “organized mass-tourist” through to “individual mass-tourist” and “explorer”, to the most individualistic and least institutionalized type, the “drifter” (E. Cohen, 1973, p. 89). And Cohen (1973, p. 89) conceives of the “drifter” as one “who ventures furthest away from the beaten track...He[*she*] tends to make it wholly on his[*she*] own, living with people and often taking odd-jobs to keep himself[*herself*] going... He[*she*] tries to live the way the people he[*she*] visits live... with no fixed itinerary or timetable and no well-defined goals of travel.” It seems that some descriptions of drifters can also apply to helpers. I here try to discuss in which aspects they share similar traits and in which way they differ from each other.

While drifters value their choice of “venturing furthest away from the beaten track” and they are often dismissive of touristic offerings, helpers seem to have broader interests from dwelling with a host in downtown areas of big cities to isolated sparsely populated countryside. Helpers are also still interested in seeing landmarks. My interviews demonstrate that the “furthest away from the beaten track” is not on everyone’s mind when they choose to do work-accommodation exchange. Respondent #4 talks about how she chooses hosts based on location. Personally, she prefers homestays in cities and if there is none available then she would look in the suburbs and countryside. She admitted that she prefers easily accessible locations, which have public transportation. From her considerations of location, we can see that she is not searching for the “off-the-beaten-track” locations; she is searching for convenient, accessible locations. This may differ work-accommodation exchange itself from the “drifter”, which is at one extreme of the continuum more aimed at finding the off-the-beaten track and risky experiences. On the other hand, some of the helpers tended to have higher risk control and they were in search of a more safe, stable experiences.

Cohen described the “drifter” as “often taking odd-jobs to keep himself[*herself*] going”, this characteristic is also significant in the tramping tradition of the 18th century (E. Cohen, 1973, p. 89). The feature of casual employment and training in

the tramping tradition contributed to the more recent types of drifter and backpacker tourism (Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995, p. 822). Helpers do not take paid odd jobs instead they trade labor in exchange for room and board, which could be seen as another form of “taking odd-jobs”. Work-accommodation exchange is most often unpaid work and the majority of helpers will not have any incomes generated from work-accommodation exchange. This is different from drifters, backpackers and working holiday-makers. They take jobs and make their own money to pay for housing and food. So, there is the possibility for them to spare and save some money. At the same time, they are responsible for renting a housing and commuting, etc. Generally speaking, it takes a longer time to find a job and settle in for backpackers and working holiday-makers than for helpers to make deals with hosts and travel to stay with them. Thus, many choose to become a helper because they do not have a longer period of time to look for jobs and housing. Backpacker jobs are mainly physical work with high intensity and repetition. For example, the grape picking jobs may require backpackers to wake up early at 5 am and work non-stop picking for hours. While work-accommodation exchange has a larger range of activities from which to choose, the most common work is also labor work such as deep cleaning, and weeding. In most of the cases, backpackers and working holiday-makers work longer than five hours a day, which is the average working hours for helpers for a day. All these conditions serve to distinguish helpers from other itinerant travel forms. A more detailed discussion of helpers’ work arrangements appeared in 4.4 work analysis.

Drifters are also described as people who “live the way the people he[*she*] visits live” (E. Cohen, 1973, p. 89). This characteristic of a drifter is surely passed on to helpers in work-accommodation exchange. They literally live the way the hosts live as they share the same roof, dinner tables and sometimes work together as well. In fact, work-accommodation exchange offers a rare and diversified chance to “live the way the people he[*she*] visits live”, which is very difficult to obtain in most other forms of tourism practices. The helpers and the hosts live together, work together and spend

much of their leisure time in the same area. The helpers can get in touch with the lives of local people, not just as a passing tourist. This opportunity to be fully involved in another family's life and immersed in the culture is one of the gains that helpers' value most. Since it helps to broaden their horizons and assists in learning about new cultures even new languages.

Cohen also conceives of drifters as having "no fixed itinerary or timetable and no well-defined goals of travel", which is also notable among some helpers (E. Cohen, 1973, p. 89). From time to time, helpers choose to stay with the most suitable host they can find and sometimes they have to drive or take a bus for hours to get there. And they are flexible about how long they will stay with a host. It actually depends on both sides and sometimes helpers prolong their stays and other times they choose to leave early. While some helpers simply do not have instrumental purposes in mind, others may have some well-defined purposes and are expressly aiming to develop certain skills through work-accommodation exchanges.

b. working tourism

Besides drifters, there is the antecedent of various forms of working tourism, the most famous of which is the working holiday. Working holiday-makers are youths, who travel to different countries for short or long periods of time to work there (E. Cohen, 1973, p. 91). It is most common that they travel to developed countries especially those countries that need a seasonal workforce such as Australia and New Zealand. The working holiday most often consists of two parts, working in farms or factories to make money and road trips to have fun. The working holiday-makers are able to finance their road trips after working at the farms and factories. They are most often in groups and they share connections and work information and later on travel together. Working holiday-makers have more or less set the "culture model" for work-accommodation exchange. Indeed, they share plenty of characteristics, particularly, the unwillingness to follow mainstream travel routines as well as a willingness to work to supplement their travel funds. Yet considerable differences exist between working holiday-making and work-accommodation exchange. Working

holiday-makers are usually in groups whereas in work-accommodation exchange there tends to be more solo travelers. Working holiday-makers ordinarily work for money while helpers work for free accommodation and food. Work-accommodation exchange has a larger range of work than working holiday-making. Working holiday-makers spend a lot of time with fellow workers while helpers spend a lot of time with the host (the local).

However, it is important to note that the role of travelers is constantly changing and evolving, and many times they have more than one role for they can be backpackers/working holiday-makers/ helpers at the same time. They may start their trip as working holiday-makers and then choose to become a helper and then later backpackers. The roles are not immutable and sometimes the lines are hard to draw between those roles. The phenomenon I studied has somehow found its place in a broader field, together with other travel forms, and possibly can be seen as a later, modern version of the drifter. As mentioned earlier, contemporary helpers may also have more heterogeneous origins than drifters, and they are far removed from the descriptors: “hippie”, or an adherent to “counter-culture”.

c. new trends

Work-accommodation exchange differs from other forms of itinerant travel in essential aspects. Hence, it should be discussed and understood in its own right. As people around the world start recognizing this phenomenon, work-accommodation exchange itself has also transformed to become more routinized and institutionalized. On the other hand, it has also become tightly associated with the current culture, which is more tolerate to an individual's ‘loosening of ties and obligations, the abandonment of accepted standards and conventional ways of life’ (E. Cohen, 1973, p. 93). Foremost is the cultural force. Work-accommodation exchange is in some sense a striking manifestation of the imagery of the traveling youth culture, spontaneous and authentic. And, the same as in Cohen's (1973) description of drifters, the individualistic helpers want to “see the world as it really is” (p. 92). Nowadays, they have less obligations, there is better ‘acceptance of unconventional ways of living and

diversity’; they ‘voluntary abnegate comfort of familiarity to search for sensual and meaningful experiences’ (E. Cohen, 1973, p. 93). Cohen (1973) described this culture as counter-culture. It seems that as our society has become more advanced and tolerant, the culture is no longer a counter culture, it is moving to become a part of mainstream culture. It has become popular on the Internet and in songs like “young, dumb and broke”, “young, wild and free”, which sketch a new picture of what youth like. Also, as the aging population is growing in many countries in the world, there will be a bigger need for labor. Young helpers can be seen as an alternative form of short-term labor to supplement this market.

Since I first became a helper in 2015, work-accommodation exchange has changed from an interesting but relatively minor phenomenon in several sparsely populated countries into one worthy of noting trends in the tourism industry today. In this process, the phenomenon itself has developed and transformed. On the one hand, the helper community has boomed and enlarged due to media and word of mouth effects so it spawns a need that helpers need to approach hosts and make deals much earlier. On the other hand, though originally a win-win labor and care exchange together with a cultural dimension, it seems that nowadays some of the hosts and helpers have become “egoistic”, and are trying to make the most use of the exchange for themselves.

In my interviews, it was interesting to see that some respondents captured the changes they have encountered in work-accommodation exchange. Respondent #5 affirmed that he will not choose work-accommodation exchange as his prioritized way of travel in the future because he has learned that both sides (host and helper) in work-accommodation exchange are raising their standards to some extent. Helpers are in search of more authentic, fun experiences with a very nice host, while the hosts are looking for more hardworking candidates. Both sides can read reviews and profiles to find things for which they are looking. This makes it harder to make a deal and arrange things. When I asked Respondent #5 why both sides had become pickier, he thought the reason behind it was comparison. He said: “they (hosts) have had some

very tough handy helpers who have done so much work for them, then next time they wouldn't want someone who has no farm experiences at all and they may just compare you with the former helpers and think that you never work hard enough...". And, it is similar for helpers, when they have stayed with several hosts and have had experiences. Probably, they develop a preference toward certain types of hosts and they become mindful of their choices or "pickier" as described by respondent #5.

Respondent #3 also found that now helpers have to contact host months in advance. She wanted to do work-accommodation exchange with her friends in October and when she browsed through the websites, she saw many hosts looking for helpers in January. I have encountered the same situation when I tried to find hosts for my trip to Canada; I had to apply two months earlier to secure a stay with someone. Respondent #5 says when she first started doing work-accommodation exchange; the host only updated their posts when they needed helpers for that moment, she advised "when you look at the hosts that have recently updated, those are the ones that you should apply." Now, it seems that you have to apply much earlier and tell hosts everything that you can do. This witnessed change is also a sign that the hosts are more mindful of their choices and they want to get to know the helper better before they agree to host them.

Also, for some helpers, traveling via work-accommodation exchange is just one stage of their life. They are either students in their summer holidays or young people having a gap year or on a working holiday. Respondent #1 admitted that in the future when he starts working, he might choose to stay at hotels at nights and go sightseeing during the day instead of doing work-accommodation exchange. These trips will be more affordable if he has a stable job and he also considers it more time-saving.

To round up our discussion, itinerant travel forms of drifting and backpacking can be seen as antecedents to today's phenomenon of work-accommodation exchange. They share similarities yet clearly have their differences. The phenomenon of work-accommodation exchange should also be discussed and understood in its own context. Work-accommodation exchange is a striking manifestation of the imagery of

spontaneous and authentic trips for some youth. It also demonstrates a tendency that both helpers and hosts are become more mindful of their choices and helpers need to book to stay with hosts months in advance.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

Throughout this study I have reflected on the research question in order to find the best angle to analyze how do helpers ascribe meaning to the phenomenon of work-accommodation exchange. Moreover, I have also sought to connect my collected data with the research literature that related to studying the phenomenon, in the hope that the literature would help the whole project.

As I mentioned, in the history of the itinerant travel, multiple forms of itinerant travel can be seen as antecedents to today's phenomenon of work-accommodation exchange. Comparing the literature and my gathered data, I captured some signs of lineages in work-accommodation exchange from drifters or even from earlier forms of itinerant travel. Cohen (1972)'s description of "drifter" provided a dimension to discuss who the helpers are and what characteristics they have. Helpers in the work-accommodation exchange phenomenon can be seen as a late modern version of drifter. In this process, helpers accumulate experiences instead of accumulating money via working. I discovered that some helpers can be characterized as young (mostly millennials), at a junction in their lives (mostly just finished education or between jobs), and come from families upon whom they are not reliant for financial help to live by. And there is an emerging trend of more Asian helpers.

The work element is of considerable importance in work-accommodation exchange. My discussion demonstrated that some helpers believe work-accommodation exchange thrives on the premise that it is a relatively fair exchange relationship between hosts and helpers. And that is also what makes work-accommodation exchange sustainable and accepted by most people. My discussion moved towards the more abstract terrain of identity and I found that some helpers liked to distinguish themselves from backpackers as backpacking has been a westernized concept from the beginning. These helpers considered work-accommodation exchange as a more exclusive and smaller group of people having less risky cultural exchange experiences. Sometimes, the helpers are invited to join family activities or local events, some helpers

tend to consider it as inviting gesture from the hosts and feel grateful for their hosts' kindness. Some helpers also claimed to have great experience in the nature and wilderness. Sometimes their hosts play the role of local guides, which could also be seen as helpers' privileges. Working as a helper provide possibility to live a local and being a part of a local family.

To avoid being vulnerable in work-accommodation exchange, it could be helpful to talk about work arrangements and living conditions before arrival to minimize miscommunication and get both sides on the same page. It also could be helpful if both helpers and hosts asked more questions about each other to make sure they fit with each other. The phenomenon itself has developed and transformed. Helpers and hosts have become more mindful of choosing hosts/ helpers, so it spawns a need that helpers have to approach hosts much earlier. Though originally a win-win labor and care exchange together with a cultural dimension, it seems that nowadays some of the hosts and helpers have become more "egoistic" and more interested in gaining from their counterpart. This is maybe a dilemma in the process and could bring negative effects to this phenomenon. The platforms should be aware of this situation and warn people.

I acknowledge that there are many limitations in this research; however, the results of this research may offer some information for future research. In this research, I have touched on how do helpers ascribe meaning to work-accommodation exchange phenomenon without focusing on any particular group. Yet, it could be interesting to study helpers from certain specific groups such as Chinese helpers or French helpers in Australia. After all, work-accommodation exchange community is of great diversity, a specific group of helpers may have different characteristics than the ones in this research. The new trends as mentioned earlier would be interesting to follow and observe to see how this phenomenon develops. The reviews in the helpx website are also very informative in a way that both helpers and hosts are writing good and bad comments about their experiences. Such reviews could be extremely positive or extremely negative but carrying out an in-depth study of these online documents

could contribute to understanding work-accommodation exchange phenomenon from another angle.

The organization and platforms would have a bigger audience if they translated the websites into other languages. Hosts are also extremely central to this phenomenon, therefore, it is also meaningful to consider the reaction of the host society to the phenomenon of work-accommodation exchange, such as what is their understanding of this phenomenon, why do they want to engage in work-accommodation exchange, and what is their gain from it and if they feel vulnerable being a host under certain circumstances? It is also practical to study the hosts based on age, nationality, travel experiences or life stages. For example, the results from a study focusing on retired hosts may be different from a study focusing on hosts who are a young family with kids. A multidisciplinary perspective would be beneficial in studying this phenomenon. If we can integrate approaches from, for example, sociology, socio-psychology, leisure studies, economics, these would help to interpret and broaden understanding of this phenomenon. Thus, more investigations should be considered in order to develop further in-depth understandings of work-accommodation exchange.

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APPENDIX: I. Interview Guide

Interview guide

Theme 1	Introduce yourself
Question 1	Could you introduce a little bit about yourself?
Probing	nationality, age, occupation, ongoing project... education background, work experience, hobbies
Question 2	What previous travel experiences you have?
Probing	as classic tourists, travel agency, with friends, family

Theme 2	Overview HelpX/ Workaway work experiences
Question 1	Where have you been doing HelpX/ workaway?
Question 2	How long did you stay there?
Question 3	What kind of work you did?
Question 4	What kind of accommodation?
Question 5	What kind of host did you have?
Probing	Farmer, retired, young couple?

Theme 3	Mapping relations/interactions with host and other travelers
Question 1	How you make the agreement with the host?
Probing	Did you find it hard/ easy/ anxious/comfortable to reach them on HelpX? Did they reply fast/slowly? Were they nice/helpful/flexible/difficult? How many percentages replied? How many don't? Did you write to many hosts at the same time to make sure you get at least one reply? What did you do if many of them reply and want to host you?

	<p>How did you feel before you meet them?</p> <p>Did any host cancel on you? Change of plan in the last minute?</p> <p>Did you talk about the work agreement before arrival? Were you clear about what will be happening?</p>
Question 2	Describe the first arrival day at the host's?
Question 3	How would you like to describe your relation with the host?
	The rest of the stay
Question 4	How were the interactions with other helpers?
Probing	<p>Did you get along with/become friends with them?</p> <p>Did you have a good time/ quality time with them?</p> <p>What did you do together?</p> <p>Did you have deep conversation with them?</p> <p>Do they share their experience/ stories with you?</p> <p>Do you keep contact with them?</p>
Question 5	Did you join the local community or get to meet other people?
Probing	<p>In which way? And How?</p> <p>Do these experiences help you to get to know another culture or local community?</p> <p>Ideally, how much do you want to engage with the local community?</p>

Theme 4	The good, the bad and the ugly
Question 1	What is your most memorable HelpX/Workaway experience?
Probing	<p>Where, when, with whom?</p> <p>What you did, what happened?</p> <p>How did you feel? Why memorable?</p>
Question 2	What is your worst HelpX/Workaway experience?
Probing	<p>Where, when, with whom?</p> <p>What you did, what happened?</p>

	How did you feel? Why memorable?
Question 3	Have you ever had a sense of dangerousness or insecurity when you engaged in Helpx?
Probing	When, where, how was it? How did you feel? What did you do? Who did you turn for help or advices?
Question 4	Have you ever felt vulnerable at some point?
Probing	When and where and why? How did you cope with it? Who did you turn for help or advices? What happens next?

Theme 5	How do you identify yourself and others
Question 2	How would you like to describe the typical helper?
Probing	Background, personality, appearance, stage of life...
Question 2	We all have different roles in our lives, according to you, what roles did you play\have when you engaged in HelpX?
Probing	e.g. worker, guest, friend, traveler... Are those roles different from the roles you had before?
Question 3	How do you relate doing Helpx to Backpacking? Do you consider yourself as a backpacker? Why or why not?
Probing	
Question 4	What kind of response have you gotten to your HelpX traveling from others? Your family, your friends?
Probing	How is that influence you?

Theme 6	Detail Questions about influences
Question 1	How has these experiences influence you, change who you are as a person?
Probing	Do you think these experiences influence your personality, thoughts, well-being?

	<p>Does it influence your mindset?</p> <p>Have you learned anything? Practical, cultural</p> <p>Influence your future career or your life path?</p> <p>To what degree learning</p>
Question 2	How has these experiences help you get to know yourself better? In which way?
Probing	Any specific examples?

Theme 7	HelpX pros and cons
Question 1	What's your assessment of the current state of HelpX and Workaway?
Probing	<p>the negative\positive sides, how popular it is?</p> <p>Why is has come popular?</p>
Question 3	What can be improved about HelpX/ Workaway?

APPENDIX: II. The information Letter

Request for participation in research project

An Investigation into How Helpers Ascribe Meanings to the Phenomenon of Work-accommodation exchange

This is a master thesis project about Work-accommodation exchange. The aim of this interview is to collect different narratives and analyze how helpers ascribe meaning to this phenomenon. The in-depth qualitative interview lasts for about 60 minutes. It could be longer or shorter. The interviews will be recorded and later transcribed. All the information provided are granted anonymity and will be well kept. Besides, respondents can withdraw from the project at any time after the interview if they have any regrets.

If you would like to participate or if you have any questions concerning the project, please contact Yan Jiang: +47 96705798. The study has been notified to the Data Protection Official for Research, NSD - Norwegian Centre for Research Data. Consent for participation in the study I have received information about the project and am willing to participate

(Signed by participant, date)

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