

# Volunteer Travel and Learning Experiences in an Intentional Community: The Case of Sadhana Forest



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# **Volunteer Travel and Learning Experiences in an Intentional Community: the Case of Sadhana Forest**

**Thesis MSc Leisure, Tourism and Environment**

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**Registration Nr. 84111915100**

**Thesis Code: SAL-80433**

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**Date: 29 June 2011**

## **Abstract**

The aim of this thesis is to explore the transformative/learning potentials of volunteer tourism in the context of an ecovillage/intentional community. In specific, looking into an ecovillage as a community of practice, this study is exploring its potential as a ground for transformative learning. Sadhana Forest, one of the many communities in Auroville, an ecovillage, part of the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) in South India has been selected as the case study. The final objective of this study is to unravel the broader impact of travel to intentional communities that are increasingly becoming travel destination for volunteers. The results of the qualitative research revealed that spaces such as intentional communities, that I have termed 'bubbles' have a great potential in fostering the paradigmatic shift towards the so called new paradigm, Transmodernity. In specific 'bubbles' serve as safe, nurturing space where travellers can try out new roles that they might take on in their future lives. Furthermore travellers have ample opportunities to learn in free flowing, creative ways, as has been identified for communities of practice. Learning revolves around sustainability, and alternative ways of being and living.

**Key Words:** volunteer tourism, transformative learning, communities of practice, ecovillage, intentional community, Cultural Creatives, Transmodernity.

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# 1. Introduction

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In this chapter I will provide a background of the research by introducing the most important theoretical concepts that will lead to the identification of the research gap in which this thesis is consequently positioned. Then the research objectives and research questions are presented followed by a short account of the empirical context, and a clarification of the type of study and its relevance. I finish with an outline of the thesis.

## 1.1. Background

In times of general turmoil and multiple crises such as financial, environmental, political, and social Duane Elgin warns us:

*“The human family has entered a pivotal time in history when we are challenged to make not superficial changes, but a deep transformation in our manner of everyday living...As...warnings by the world’s senior scientists indicate, powerful trends are now converging into a whole-systems crisis, creating the likelihood of a planetary-scale evolutionary crash within this generation. These ‘adversity trends’ include growing disruption of the global climate, an enormous increase in human population is living in gigantic cities without access to sufficient land and water needed to grow their own food, the depletion of vital resources such as fresh water and cheap oil, the massive and rapid extinction of animal and plant species around the world, growing disparities between the rich and the poor and the spread of weapons of mass destruction. The potential for ‘vast human misery’ and conflict seems very great. Another path is possible. Rather than pull apart in destructive conflict, the human community could choose to pull together in cooperation and work collaboratively to create a sustainable future”* (Elgin, in Walker, 2005, p. xiv)

One of the essential requirements for humanity to move toward a more sustainable future is to rethink the design of its communities. As Capra (1996 p.4) has articulated: *“This in a nutshell, is the great challenge of our time: to create sustainable communities – that is to say, social and cultural environments in which we can satisfy our needs and aspirations without diminishing the chances for future generations”*.

In recent years there has been increased interest within the arena of ‘alternative’ with a major focus on sustainable models of living. Throughout Europe and North America vast growth has been noted in the development of experimental / alternative models of settlement (Maxey and Pickerill, 2006). Much of this focus has been on models of settlement such as, ecovillages, co-housing and low impact development (Maxey and Pickerill, 2006, Manzella, 2010). A trend towards simpler, more sustainable ways of living has evolved from the counterculture movements in the 1960s to an exponential growth in the last decade or so of these various types of intentional communities. There are currently several thousands of these communities worldwide and their numbers are increasing rapidly (Mulder, Costanza, & Erickson, 2006).

A broad definition of intentional community encompasses a host of collective, intentional experiences, from the Pilgrim colony to early Mormon communities, from Puritan settlements in the New World to Western and Eastern monastic societies, from Danish co-housing, to German peace activists who set up ‘ecovillages’ next to nuclear power plants, from hippie communes to Israeli

kibbutzim, from anthroposophical Camphill communities to artist colonies. In social sciences, the term intentional community also may be used to describe any genre of social movement aimed at alternative lifestyles (Manzella, 2010).

Geoph Kozeny (1996), coordinator of the Fellowship for Intentional Communities describes intentional community as such:

*“An intentional community is a group of people who have chosen to live together with a common purpose, working cooperatively to create a lifestyle that reflects their shared core values. The people may live together on a piece of rural land, a suburban home, or in an urban neighborhood, and they may share a single residence or live in a cluster of dwellings.”*

These communities are specifically designed to enhance their residents' quality of life by balancing concerns for interpersonal relationships, personal growth and development and connection with nature, with need for physical subsistence. Mulder, Costanza et al. (2006) argue that intentional communities can achieve a higher quality of life with less resources consumption than unintentional communities and thus serve as models for sustainable development. Hence, there is much we can learn from intentional communities around the world that have been actively experimenting with issues related to quality of life and sustainability.

Ecovillage, a term coined by Robert Gilman (1991), came into common usage in the early 1990s, as a response to the developing ecological crisis (Sizemore, 2004); it can be seen as an evolution of the intentional communities. In 1994 the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) was formed to foster communication between many small, experimental communities. An ecovillage is a specific form of intentional community. What differentiates it is its explicit emphasis on ecology. It is this *“marriage of environmental concern and community building that distinguishes the ecovillage movement from other intentional communities, both historical and contemporary”* (Kirby, 2003). Ecovillages see themselves as holistic, relying on a ‘three-legged stool’ upon which they balance practical efforts to create a life that is socially and personally satisfying, and ecologically sound. An ecovillage is most frequently defined in the following way: a human-scale settlement (usually between 50 and 500 members, though there are exceptions) that is intended to be full-featured — providing food, manufacturing, leisure, social opportunities, and commerce — the goal of which is the harmless integration of human activities into the environment in a way that supports healthy human development in physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual ways, and is able to continue into the indefinite future (Gilman 1991; Bang 2005, p. 27). It would be more precise to say that this describes an ideal ecovillage rather than an actual one. Ross Jackson (2004, p. 26, in Kasper, 2008) is careful to point out, *“the ideal ecovillage does not exist. It is a work in process — a fundamental component of the new paradigm, where much is yet to be learned.”*

It was the generation of Woodstock and the baby boomers who laid the foundations of some of the more successful late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> –century intentional communities (Manzella, 2010). Just as the counterculture represented a quest for identity, it also challenged the prevailing social order. That too has carried over to this time as contemporary intentional communities also critique and challenge the assumptions of modern life, although the challenge is milder, more studied, and less confrontational. The ecovillage can be seen as a manifestation but also an agent of what is claimed to be the current paradigm shift, and a major change of global consciousness, termed as the new paradigm of Transmodernity (Rodriguez Magda, 1989, 2001; Ghisi, 1999, 2006, 2010; Ateljevic, 2009; Gelter, 2008).

In times of multifaceted global crises, where humans seek for sustainable living, I have been intrigued and strongly personally motivated to explore how ecovillages, as a potential solution to these problems can act as a learning travel destination.

## 1.2. Transformation and Learning

Learning is a major focus in this study. Therefore I am going to connect key fields of mobilities such as the ecovillage with communities of practice as a ground for learning for travellers. So, at this point I want to introduce the reader to the concept of communities of practice. The term has been coined by social anthropologist Jean Lave her PhD student Etienne Wenger (1991). They identified that learning has a social and communal facet to it, it is a collective activity (Denscombe, 2008). A community of practice is a group of people who *“share a concern or a passion”* and *“engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor”* and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly (Wenger, 1998). Communities of practice have three characteristics that are essential: the domain, the community, and the practice. In communities of practice there needs to be a common domain of interest and therefore being a member implies that you are committed to the domain (Wenger, 1998). The community includes practitioner members who participate in activities and discussions help each other, and share information, which leads to relationship building that results in the members learning from each other (Wenger, 1998). The practice includes practitioner members that develop a shared collection of resources, such as, experiences, stories, tools, and ways of addressing recurring problems (Wenger, 1998).

In this study I will look at intentional communities as communities of practice. According to Greenberg, founder of the Living Routes<sup>1</sup> program, ecovillages are physical and social ‘living laboratories’ experimenting with new technologies, social structures, and worldviews; researching and teaching sustainable practices. They tend to have a trial and error mentality and are quick to adjust to changing conditions, challenges, and opportunities. What is particularly attractive is the experiential element as they engage all of the learner’s faculties—head, heart, and hands. Ecovillage education can be seen as part of a wider trend toward environmental education based on systems thinking (Dawson, 2010). Furthermore it is holistic—exploring interdependence and the relationships between issues and subjects. According to Dawson (2010) what is distinctive in the ecovillage educational model is that *“the learning experience unfolds in the context of a live experiment in the translation of post-consumerist values into the fabric of a sustainable community”*.

My aim is to explore the potential of such communities as a ground for transformative learning for volunteers and travellers. Transformative learning is a term used in educational theory, first coined by Mezirow (1991), to describe a process which leads the learner to re-evaluate past beliefs and experiences which had previously been understood within assumptions derived from others. O’Sullivan (2003), head of the Transformative Learning program of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto gives the following definition:

*“Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and irreversibly alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of*

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<sup>1</sup> A study abroad program. ( <http://www.livingroutes.org/>, accessed 2011, June 19)



*relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body awareness, our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy."*

### **1.3. Gap Identification and the contribution of this study**

As Manzella (2010) notes not everyone seeking an escape from the anxieties of contemporary living is able or willing to move to an intentional community. But the 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen the evolution of a variety of novel forms of finding community. These range from volunteer associations to university courses (such as the Living Routes program) or the Gaia Education<sup>2</sup> and woofing<sup>3</sup> to informal visits to such communities. As travel has grown, such places have become more accessible. Manzella (2010) purports these alternatives to traditional communities often effectively mime the communal experience. I will argue that these experiences can at least give a glimpse of what community life is about. They offer the space for travellers to step out of their 'mainstream regular' lives and societies to learn and experience different ways of living and being. Travel has often been associated with learning, e.g. the Grand Tour of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century in Europe (Galani-Moutafi, 2000; Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995) and the 19<sup>th</sup> century working class 'tramp' (Adler, 1985); travel as a rite of passage (Turner, 1969); gap year; and educational tourism. In this research I am trying to unravel the learning that occurs not from travelling in general but from visiting and volunteering in a specific setting namely an intentional community or ecovillage that also constitutes a community of practice. Furthermore there appears to be a gap also in the literature on volunteer tourism. Voluminous of research has been conducted on nature based or wildlife volunteering as well as on community volunteering. What is unique in the case of this study is the context of the volunteer experience, which is an intentional community. This community among others aims in restoring the environment (similar to nature-based voluntourism), and has some unique elements of community life that differs from unintentional communities. This is because intentional communities have a set of principles and values that drive every action within them. These values and ideals pose an alternative to the 'mainstream' culture. Furthermore learning and transformation can occur in any kind of volunteer travel experience. However, I suggest that, what makes volunteering in the context of an intentional community different is that learning in such a space is aimed towards a specific area of knowledge. This is sustainable living from a holistic point of view.

### **1.4. Research Objective and Research Questions**

The main focus of this study is to explore the learning outcomes from a volunteer experience in an intentional community that serves also as a community of practice. Furthermore I try to unfold the impact and the transformation on the traveller from the experience of volunteering in such a community.

To meet the research objective and fill in the knowledge gap I have formulated the following research questions:

**RQ1.** What do travellers seek from the experience of volunteering in an intentional community?

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<sup>2</sup> See: <http://www.gaiaeducation.org/>

<sup>3</sup> WWOOF is a worldwide network of organizations that link people who want to volunteer on organic farms in return for food, accommodation and opportunities to learn about organic lifestyle with people who are looking for volunteer help. (<http://www.woof.org/>, accessed 2011, June 19)

**RQ2.** What is the perceived learning outcome from a volunteer experience in an intentional community?

**RQ3.** How does the volunteer experience in an intentional community affect and transform the traveller

**RQ4.** What is the potential broader impact of travel to intentional communities that are increasingly becoming travel destination for volunteers?

## 1.5. Empirical Context

For the purpose of this research I selected Sadhana Forest as my case study. Sadhana Forest is part of Auroville, an eco-town and member of the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN). Auroville (City of Dawn) is an experimental township in Tamil Nadu, South India, founded in 1968 by Mirra Alfassa, known as the Mother based on the teachings of Sri Aurobindo. *"Auroville wants to be a universal town where men and women of all countries are able to live in peace and progressive harmony above all creeds, all politics and all nationalities. The purpose of Auroville is to realize human unity."* (<http://www.auroville.org/>).

In the context of Auroville, Sadhana Forest started in December 2003 as a reafforestation project. The vision of its founders, Yorit and Aviram Rozin, is to transform 70 acres of severely eroded, arid land into a vibrant, indigenous Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest (TDEF). In a spirit of human unity, their aim is to introduce a growing number of people to sustainable living. (<http://sadhanaforest.org/wp/about/>). By now more than 20.500 indigenous TDEF plants of 150 different indigenous species have been planted, with a survival rate between 80%-90% and the underground water table has risen by 6 meters. (<http://sadhanaforest.org/wp/about/>). This has been done with the labor and love of more than 1,600 volunteers, interns and students from every corner of our planet. Sadhana Forest is a volunteer-based community. Volunteers' activities include mainly planting, mulching and watering trees according to season, working in the little organic vegetable garden, maintaining the community area, and spending time with the community kids. Volunteers are introduced to the life of the community which is an eco-friendly, very simple way of life including veganism (i.e. nothing of animal origin), alternative construction, solar energy, biodegradable toiletries, and dry compost toilets. Besides the Forest there are a few more ongoing projects such as the Eco Film Club, the Eco cycle Yatra and the Children's Land that volunteers can get involved with.

Sadhana offers plenty of opportunities for volunteers to learn. These can vary from learning by simply working and taking care of all the little aspects of everyday life in order for the community to work to just interacting with each other volunteers. In addition there are some a bit more organized ways of learning, such as workshops, discussions, movies. I regard Sadhana Forest as a community of practice because it is a (intentional) community, that has sustainable living as its common domain of practice and through their practice people try to find solutions. The learning that occurs is free-flowing and shared; it is often informal and experiential. It is not one way, in a top-down fashion; everybody is a learner and everybody can be a teacher. The community seeks for best practices from all around the world, applied on its specific locality which often leads to innovation.

## 1.6. Type of Study

This study falls into the category of exploratory research as it aims to unravel the impact and transformation that occurs to travellers, namely volunteer tourists who visit an intentional community. The study fits in the interpretative paradigm as allows the participants of the research to give meaning to their situation. It is a purely qualitative research. I followed the case study approach, with Sadhana Forest being the case under study where I conducted the fieldwork. For the purpose of this study I did participant observation letting myself immerse in the experience of volunteering at Sadhana Forest for the period of 4 weeks. Furthermore I conducted 25 semi structured in-depth interviews with volunteer tourists and one of the founders of the community. In addition to that a couple of months after my departure from Sadhana Forest I collected post experience reflection papers via email from volunteers I got to know while I was in Sadhana Forest.

## 1.7. Relevance of the Study

A volunteer experience at an intentional community offers immense opportunities to a traveller to learn. That can be in practical, but also psychological and other terms. I believe that is important to better understand these potentials and possibly enhance them. So this study could be of relevance to both the intentional community and the traveller. Especially if we take into consideration Orr's words:

*"The plain fact is that the planet does not need more successful people. But it does desperately need more peacemakers, healers, restorers, storytellers, and lovers of every kind. It needs people who live well in their places. It needs people of moral courage willing to join the fight to make the world more habitable and humane. And these qualities have little to do with success as our culture defined it."* (Orr 1994, p.12)

This study aspires to add to what Ateljevic et al. (2007) calls *"academy of hope"*, one that *"nurtures open minds and open hearts and is founded on principles of interdependence, respect, equality and humanity"*.

In what concerns intentional communities, in recent year, education and tourism have become a major part of their income. Tourism is something that intentional communities should be cautious of, in the sense that they should prevent the negative impacts tourism can have on the communities. So drawing tourists who come for specific reasons, such as learning can be seen as a way to mitigate the negative impacts of tourism. In addition this study hopes to demonstrate some of the benefits of tourism and mobilities such as the exchange of ideas, experiences etc. that can lead to best practices and innovation. Last, this study can be of relevance for the communities that want to know what kind of impact they have on their visitors.

## 1.8. Thesis Outline

In this paragraph I will reveal the general outline and structure of this thesis. The second chapter will provide the theoretical framework of the thesis; it contains an extended literature review of the main theoretical concepts used in this research; these are intentional communities, ecovillages, communities of practice, transformative learning and volunteer tourism. I will also tap into the signs

of a paradigm shift, such as the emergence of the Cultural Creative, that point towards the so called new paradigm of Transmodernity. Chapter three presents the empirical context of this research. It gives a brief overview of Auroville, its history, purpose, visions and main principles. Then I give an extended description of Sadhana Forest, how it came into being, and how it has evolved. This is followed by a detailed account of the everyday life in the community drawn from my experience as a volunteer there. Consequently I present, taking among others from the interview I had with Aviram, one of its founders, some of the elements that I believe make Sadhana Forest a unique experience and an interesting ground for transformative learning. The fourth chapter explains the methodology I used to conduct this research. The fifth chapter consists of the analysis of the data, these being semi structured in-depth interviews with volunteer travellers, post-experience reflection papers that were emailed to me by volunteers as well as insights from my participant observation. Last but not least is the chapter of conclusion in which I present the main findings of the research, I refer to the limitations of this study and I point to suggestions for further research.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

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### 2.1. Introduction

This chapter consists of a literature review of the different theoretical concepts that will provide the theoretical pillar to support the finding of this study. An in-depth literature study is necessary to get familiar with the different concepts. In the first part I will present the concept of intentional communities, then the history of the ecovillages followed by a more detailed description of these. Second, in the context of signs of change I will elaborate on the Cultural Creatives, the emergent paradigm shift, Transmodernity and the role of ecovillages in the global shift of consciousness. In this study I look at the intentional community or ecovillage as a Community of Practice and I examine its potential as a ground for Transformative Learning. Therefore in the following sections I will present the concepts of Communities of Practice and Transformative Learning. As the study is focused on volunteer travellers I provide first a short section on the connection between travel and learning. Last but not least I will give a detailed account of the so far existing literature on Volunteer Tourism.

### 2.2. Intentional Communities

Community patterns of living have been the norm for most of human history. Human beings have lived and sustained themselves in 'communities' of one form or another since the earliest of times. Our roots are tribal where our lives were deeply connected to each other and to nature, providing both security and intimacy. Animals and plants can also be thought to live and grow together in communities. Communities are the places and spaces in which and through which we organize ourselves, change, and exchange and link together (Cohen, 2010). For centuries people lived in large extended families, tribal networks or small villages that genuinely functioned like communities and a sense of neighborliness was present. It is only since our urban societies have become technologically advanced with increased personal wealth and transient lifestyles that people have, "*lost touch with a strong community consciousness*" (McLaughlin and Davidson, 1986, p. 11). According to McLaughlin and Davidson (1986) a conscious community is a group of people with a common purpose who have agreed to cooperate and create a sense of unity together. Communities of this nature have consistently sprung up in response to the ills of society. Ashrams of the East and the monasteries of the West, the early communities of America, the Utopian movement of the 1800s, the Kibbutz movement in Israel, the hippy communes of the 1960s and the new communities of the 1980s and the ecovillages in 1990s can all be considered as such communities.

What McLaughlin and Davidson (1986) describe as a conscious community is very much the same as what in the 1940s was coined an intentional community, by the Fellowship of Intentional Communities, a federation of communities and a forerunner of the current Fellowship for Intentional Communities. The Fellowship of International Communities had given the following definition:

An intentional community is a group of people who have chosen to live together with a common purpose, working cooperatively to create a lifestyle that reflects their shared core values. The people may live together on a piece of rural land, in a suburban home, or in an urban neighborhood, and they may share a single residence or live in a cluster of dwellings.

([http://wiki.ic.org/wiki/Intentional\\_Communities](http://wiki.ic.org/wiki/Intentional_Communities))

One distinguishing characteristic of such communities is embodied in the term intentional, the word intentional implying that those in the community all intend to be there and not somewhere else. Simply put, such communities are not necessarily ethnically bound (i.e. members are joined by ideas, values, and beliefs rather than genetics or descent). They *"are not like a tribe or village that began spontaneously and then persisted for generations"* (Friesen and Friesen, 2004, p.15, in Manzella, 2010). Such communities, Brown (2002, p. 165) notes, are consciously formed with a specific purpose, they are ways of restoring *"psychic equilibrium"* in a society under pressure to change. They comprise of *"a relatively small group of individuals who have created a unique way of life for the attainment of an articulated set of goals"* (Friesen and Friesen, 2004, p.15, in Manzella, 2010). Andelson (2002, p.131) notes that members of intentional communities *"actively strive to forge a shared identity"* and *"can be differentiated from the traditional community, whose origins are more often than not... 'lost in the mists of time', and the circumstantial community, whose members are thrown together by happenstance and may in fact develop little if any sense of shared identity."* (Manzella, 2010, p. xii)

We could see the term intentional community as an overarching umbrella that encompasses a variety of groups including communes, ecovillages, student cooperatives, land co-ops, cohousing groups, monasteries and ashrams, kibbutzim, and farming collectives. Although quite diverse in philosophy and lifestyle, each of these groups places a high priority on fostering a sense of community, a feeling of belonging and mutual support that is increasingly hard to find in mainstream Western society.

Since the early 1990s the term ecovillage, a specific form of intentional community has become increasingly popular and tends to almost replace the more general term of intentional community. While ecovillages may share some or all of these goals, what sets them apart is their explicit emphasis on ecology, which supplies many of the fundamental principles of design and organization (Kasper, 2008). One can see ecovillages as a reaction to the growing ecological crises, the hot problem of climate change, peak oil and extinction of species etc. In the following paragraphs I will delve deeper into the ecovillage movement.

### **2.2.1. History of the Ecovillages**

Benjamin Zablocki in his book *Alienation and Charisma* (1980) identifies four periods of community building in the U.S. preceding the most recent. Each of these period of American communitarianism is characterized by what Zablocki calls *"a major social or cultural innovation which fragmented prevailing systems of meaning and value"* (1980, 38). Change, then, is the usual catalyst to the formation of intentional communities.

According to Gilman (1991) ecovillages *"are a distinctly post-industrial phenomenon"*. This is because ecovillages address post-industrial situations, including environmental degradation, global population growth, the presence of new technologies (including scientific, communication, and renewable resource use technologies), new forms of human organization, and new levels of human understanding and awareness of our place in the universe (Gilman 1991).

The concept of ecovillages as practiced today is a fusion of ideas developed through the years in reaction to the global environmental crisis and the need for changing lifestyles (Bates 2003, p. 2). Many ecovillages in existence today evolved from previous communal experiments. Developments such as co-housing (e.g. Ithaca Ecovillage), the 1960s hippy communes (like The Farm in Tennessee), service oriented communities (such as Camphill Communities, anthroposophical settlements inspired

by Ralph Steiner) permaculture settlements (like Crystal Waters in Australia) and various other spiritual, social, or service-oriented intentional communities of the 60s, 70s, and 80s originally formed as communes, but later evolved into ecovillages (Sizemore, 2004).

According to Mare (2000) *“the ecovillage is the latest conceptualization in a long history of utopian visions: model living situations that have the potential for bringing out the best in human nature”*. Ecovillages can be seen as both a break from and continuity with earlier patterns of community formation. There is a long history of experimentation with visions of utopia, both in Europe and America, with varied backgrounds – religious, secular, co-operative, political. Most communities created in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially in America, were intended as refuges from the moral corruption of industrial society, groups that rejected the idea that moral progress was synonymous with industrial progress. Others sought to escape from the race and gender caste system in America (Pease and Pease 1963, in Moore and Wight, 2007). All of these groups were revolutionaries or reactionaries of some kind that sought to address the problems of their respective times by setting themselves apart somewhat from the mainstream and adopting and following creeds and values believed to be qualitatively superior to the status quo, often creeds and values of a spiritual nature that framed human potential in a higher, more resplendent light (Mare, 2000). The perfectionist impulse in many of these communities, that they could become self-contained heavens on earth, was shared by many of the mid-twentieth century communal and back-to-the-land movement participants. Among the most influential and first advocates of returning to a ‘simple’ rural lifestyle were Helen and Scott Nearing, who published *Living the Good Life: How to Live Simply and Sanely in a Troubled World* in 1954, based on their homesteading experience that they began during the Depression of the 1920s ( Moore and Wight, 2007).

In the late 1960s, a wave of new communities influenced by the anti-war movement, the ‘sexual revolution’, rock music, more permissive attitudes about drugs, and the popularization of Eastern religions sprung up to create cooperative lifestyles based on sexual liberation, born-again Christianity, and everything in between. In effect, these often naively idealistic utopian experiments functioned as a pressure cooker for personal and collective growth (Kozeny, 1996). Although many of the '60s groups folded during the creative but turbulent decade that followed, hundreds have survived into the '90s and are now thriving, having re-evaluated, restructured, and matured over the years.

Ecovillages nowadays are emerging as a reaction to globalization, increasing signs of environmental degradation and the loss of community principles (Christian, 2003; Kirby, 2003). Holmes (2006) sees the motivation in ecovillages as *“the choice and commitment to reverse the gradual breakdown of supportive social and cultural structures”*

### **2.2.2. Ecovillages**

The term ecovillage was first coined in 1985 by Corrine McLaughlin and Gordon Davidson, residents of the Findhorn community who set out to promote a new kind of living arrangement: small-scale communities that used *“creative problem solving”* within a loosely bureaucratic structure, whose purpose was to integrate humans and nature in ways that supported the continuity of both (Moore and Wight, 2007, p. 2). The definition offered by the GEN (Global Ecovillage Network) website is the following: *“Ecovillages are urban or rural communities of people who strive to integrate a supportive social environment with a low-impact way of life. To achieve this, they integrate various aspects of ecological design, permaculture, ecological building, green production, alternative energy, community building practices, and much more. Ecovillages are living models of sustainability. They represent an*

*effective, accessible way to combat the degradation of our social, ecological, and spiritual environments.”* (<http://gen.ecovillage.org/about/index.html>)

The authors of *Ecovillages and Sustainable Communities* (1991), Robert and Diane Gilman, define an ecovillage as *“a human-scale, full-featured settlement in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world in a way that is supportive of healthy human development and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future.”*

In order to shed light on the ecovillage and define the important elements which define an ecovillage I will elaborate on the last definition. *“Human scale,”* refers to a population within which it is possible to know and be known by others and to feel a personal impact on the community. Gilman (1991) believes that the size of community should be no than 500 to 1000 people. Bang (2005), in *Ecovillages: A Practical Guide to Sustainable Communities* holds that the ideal number of ecovillage residents is between 50 and 500. *“Full-featured settlement,”* means that day-to-day needs like providing food, shelter, employment, manufacturing, leisure, social opportunities, and commerce are met within the community. This is not referring to an isolated or completely self-sufficient settlement, but to a mixed-use community, where all aspects of life are present in a small radius. *“Human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world”*, Gilman (1991) refers to an eco-centric worldview in which humans are equal to other forms of life. Furthermore he encourages a cyclic use of material resources, rather than linear and disposable approaches (dig it up, use it once, throw it away forever). Ecovillages use renewable energy, compost waste, and avoid toxic substances. Ecovillages *“supports healthy human development”* by promoting growth in the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects of healthy life. It refers to the fulfillment of the needs of both the individual community members and the community as a whole (Gilman 1991; Bang 2005). In order to be *“successfully continued into the indefinite future”* Ecovillages must be sustainable in all three components, that is the ecological, social and environmental. They cannot be dependent upon unsustainable practices (e.g. living off the capital accumulated elsewhere) or exclusive of a stage of life such as childhood or old age. This component of ecovillage life requires a commitment to being fair and non-exploitative in present dealings with other parts of the world, in dealings with the non-human world, and in dealings with forms of life that will come in the future (Gilman 1991).

Jonathan Dawson (2006) gives another definition of Ecovillages based on five principles.

- I. Ecovillages are private citizens' initiatives. They are grassroots.
- II. Ecovillagers value community living.
- III. They are not overly dependent on government, corporate, or other centralized sources for water, food, shelter, power, and other basic necessities.
- IV. Ecovillagers have a strong sense of shared values, often characterized in spiritual terms.
- V. They often serve as research and demonstration sites. Many offer educational experiences for others.

From those five characteristics, Dawson (2006, p.36) defines ecovillages as private citizens' initiatives in which the communitarian impulse is of central importance, that are seeking to win back some measure of control over community resources, that have a strong shared value base (often referred to as 'spirituality') and that act as centers of research, demonstration and (in most cases) training. With this new definition, the purpose of ecovillages beyond the lives of the individual residents becomes clearer (Fischetti, 2008).

Even though some degree of energy and resource independence is desirable, ecovillages do not aspire to be completely self-sufficient, nor are they meant to be isolated communities of escape (Kasper, 2008). Instead, ecovillages are intended to be linked in networks of social, economic, and



political ties, and the ecovillage movement has been steadily working toward that goal (Kasper, 2008). Many ecovillages are also experimental learning communities founded (explicitly or implicitly) on the core principles of participatory research. These developments on the educational front represent an opportunity to spread ecovillage values and models into the wider society. As the world seeks to make the transition to a rich, diverse, and sustainable global society, the lessons learned by ecovillages are likely to be an important source of information and inspiration.

One of the more common objectives of ecovillages is to provide working models of how humans can live in more environmentally sustainable ways (Barton 2000, 19). To achieve this, they integrate various principles of ecological design, permaculture, natural building techniques, environmentally sustainable businesses, alternative energy, community building practices, alternative modes of transportation, and other appropriate technologies that lessen the 'ecological footprint' of a place (Sizemore, 2004). Additionally, principles and methods of collaboration, consensus building and conflict resolution, such as non-violent communication, relate to the economic and social dimension of the ecovillage and sustainable community focus. These communities represent a 'leading edge' in the movement towards developing sustainable human settlements and provide a testing ground for new ideas, techniques and technologies potentially adaptable to the mainstream (Sizemore, 2004).

According to Moore and Wight (2007) one of the distinctive differences between the communitarian and homesteading movements and the ecovillage movement is that *"it is self-consciously attempting to create communities that are 'civilized' in the sense of promoting creativity, and that provide people with high levels of comfort, that have close ties to people and activities that are not part of ecovillages themselves"*. McLaughlin and Davidson contrasted ecovillages with the communes of the 1960s: *"Instead of just living a simple rural life close to the earth", ecovillages "have often added some of the best aspects of modern culture: the beauty of art and music, the efficiency of technology"* (McLaughlin and Davidson, 1986, p. 22)

Ecovillages see themselves as holistic, seeking to *"balance practical efforts to create a life that is socially and personally satisfying and ecologically sound"* (Kasper 2008, 11). At the core of the ecovillage philosophy is a quest to bring human livelihood closer to the natural environment (Sizemore, 2004). An ecovillage integrates social, economic and environmental ways of living into small-scale settlements (Gilman, 1991; Jackson and Svensson, 2002; Bates, 2003). Ecovillages are built on the three dimensions of social/community, ecological/environmental and cultural/spiritual. The ecological component refers to people's connection to the Earth; the social dimension refers to people's desire to spend more time together and to create a supportive environment where one can thrive individually and as part of the group; the cultural/spiritual dimension alludes to a return to a way of living in which harmony with all living things is the backbone of daily life (Tobin, 2004). The spiritual is a central dimension for many ecovillages. These dimensions also describe the reasons why people are attracted to ecovillage living, although one of these dimensions may predominate more than others in some ecovillage projects and be completely absent in others (Bates, 2003). It would be fair to say that Gilman's definition describes more an ideal type ecovillage, rather than a community's defining characteristics. As Ross Jackson (2004, 26) points out, *"the ideal ecovillage does not exist. It is a work in process — a fundamental component of the new paradigm, where much is yet to be learned."* While ecovillages may not meet the criteria of Gilman's definition, these criteria tend to determine an ecovillage's overall objectives.

## 2.3. Signs of Change

“You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.”

R. Buckminster Fuller

In this section I will present the reader to phenomena which I see as signs of change. First I will describe the emergence of the Cultural Creatives, a new subculture, their values and beliefs. Then I will refer to a new paradigm that some scholars call Transmodernity. At the end I will examine how the Cultural Creatives, the Ecovillage Movement and the paradigm shift come together.

### 2.3.1. Cultural Creatives

Research such as the “World values survey” (Inglehart, 2008) has indicated that a major shift in values has been under way; the emphasis is shifting from economic achievements to post-materialist values that emphasizes self-expression, subjective well-being, and quality of life. Psychologist Sherry Anderson and sociologist Paul Ray in their book, *The Cultural Creatives*, also examined current and emerging values and social concerns among adults in the United States. They describe the emergence of what they term the Cultural Creatives, who in effect they are creating a new culture and make up possibly 50 million people, 26 per cent of the total American adult population (193 million people). Their study is based on a host of social surveys derived from two sources: values and lifestyle survey data over 13 years across the United States, and national surveys, which included one on culture (in 1995) and another on sustainability (in 1999). Cultural Creatives according to Ray and Anderson (2000) care about community, the environment, relationships, spirituality and feel disaffected with the large institutions of modern life and reject materialism and status display. Eurostat, the Statistics Office of the European Commission, used a similar method to the American Study and confirmed a similar trend of approximately 20% of the European population exhibit a similar set of values (Tchernia, 1997, in Ateljevic 2009). Similar value shift towards creativity, authenticity, globalism, self-actualization and culture has also been confirmed by others (Inglehart 1990, 1997; Abramson and Inglehart 1995; Hall 1995; Beck and Cowan 1996; Castells 1997; Kempton et al. 1997; Jensen 1999; Florida 2002, 2005; Pink 2006; Pine and Gilmore 2007; Gelter, 2008, 2010) Ghisi (2008) also gives evidence showing that this trend is quietly spreading throughout Eastern Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

Cultural Creatives according to Ray and Anderson (2000) adopt lifestyles characterized by reading, discussion, and reflection in an active search for meaning, knowledge, and wisdom. They come from all walks of life, but about half are more affluent and highly educated. A substantial majority are women energized by humanistic values.

Cultural Creatives are claimed to subscribe to more progressive values with regard to the environment and social concerns. They value on-going transformation and authenticity in their personal lives, with attention to both inner consciousness and outer action on behalf of social justice. Cultural Creatives believe that relationships are very important, they share a strong sense of community, they are committed to social equity and justice, they believe that nature is sacred, and are concerned for the natural environment and ecological sustainability. They also tend to be more altruistic, idealistic, optimistic, and spiritual than is the average American.

Within this grouping is a core group of 24 million people who have even more progressive views. Ray and Anderson (2000) describe two other main groups in America, the moderns (48% or 93 million

people) and the traditionals (24.5% or 48 million people). The moderns are the dominant culture; they accept commercialization and the urban–industrial world. They believe in personal freedom, representative democracy, civil rights, progress and consumerism. The traditionals are cultural conservatives, believing in religion, family, patriarchy, restricting immoral behavior, the military and the right to bear firearms.

Cultural Creatives, Ray and Anderson (2000) suggest depart from the more widespread modern pattern of values by a commitment to a controversial grass-roots movement such as civil rights, ecology, or peace. This commitment is typically triggered by their discontent with the gap between the current situation and their aspirations. In contrast with the rest of the population, cultural Creatives care intensely about a number of such causes. Many of them recognize connections between personal growth and social justice.

Cultural Creatives are less materialistic, less concerned about job prospects, and have fewer financial concerns (Ray and Anderson, 2000). One of the characteristics of Cultural Creatives is that they tend to be so passionately interested in their activities that the distinction between leisure and work and tourism begins to blur into ‘serious leisure’ (Stebbins, 2004). Often the Cultural Creatives end up creating work for themselves in the fields they are interested in through ‘lifestyle entrepreneurship’ (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000). Increasing numbers of people are setting up their own businesses in the creative field, because they enjoy being creative and making a living from their ‘hobby’ (Ray & Anderson, 2000).

Cultural Creatives have come together through various social movements, including those advocating social justice, civil rights, human rights, world peace, environmental protection, sustainable development, holistic health, organic foods, and spiritual psychology (Ray & Anderson, 2000). These related streams of concern are merging into a common movement committed to building a more healthy and sustainable human society. This echoes also Hawken's message in *Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Movement in the World Came into Being and Why No One Saw It Coming*. He reports that an unprecedented and truly global progressive movement has been emerging, largely unnoticed, in parallel with a shift in values (Hawken, 2007). He justifies his argument empirically by cataloguing over a million non-profit civil society groups around the world dedicated to environmental issues, social justice and indigenous rights. What is important is that more and more Cultural Creatives are discovering that they are not alone, but there are more people sharing their values, such as respect for diverse viewpoints. In a world characterized by change, diversity, and uncertainty, people committed to various specialized movements are discovering that they can cooperate if they share broad values such as mutual respect.

While this group represents less than one-third of the total adult population in the U.S.A., their numbers are growing, and as they become aware of shared values, their image of the future can lead to a social transformation. According to Ghisi (2010) around 25% of the European population are Cultural Creative and probably the same proportion in the Muslim world, in Latin America, in China and in India. He believes that there are one billion Cultural Creatives around the world of whom 66% are women.

According to Ray and Anderson (2000), the core group of the cultural Creatives are the ones who will be leading us toward achieving sustainability. Hay (2005) suggests that the symbolic analysts are likely to be these leaders. ‘Symbolic analysts’ are engaged in problem-identifying, problem-solving and strategic-brokering activities in the global knowledge economy (Reich 1991, p. 177). The symbolic analysts represent approximately 20 per cent of the workforce, including design, software,

civil and biotechnology engineers; management, financial, tax, legal and energy consultants; advertising, marketing and publishing executives, as well as research scientists and university professors (Reich 1991, pp. 177–8). They are people more powerful and influential than an average person. However in contrast to Hay that suggest that ‘symbolic analysts’ are Cultural Creative I argue that only a small portion of symbolic analysts are Cultural Creatives. Yet, because they are part of the powerful elites, their impact is quite influential and therefore they are likely to be leading the paradigm shift.

### 2.3.2. Paradigm shift

Theobald (1999) notes a number of positive trends during the past century, such as in computerization, multi-media, medicine, the development of the service sector and the production of knowledge, which have revolutionized the ways of life of societies across the world. Other reviews have postulated the resultant negative effects if we continue on our present path with only minimal adjustments to our socio-cultural system (e.g. Theobald, 1999; Elgin, 2001; Cocks, 2003).

In times faced with unprecedented environmental degradation, climate change, peak oil, population growth, financial crises, a widening gap between poor and rich and increased inequalities in general, new diseases, stress and more unhappiness there need to be some drops of hope. Reflectively, social scientists, economists, political activists, writers, spiritual leaders and many successful entrepreneurs argue that humanity needs (and is actually going through) a major global mind change and a paradigm shift (Ateljevic, 2009).

Homer-Dixon (2006) notifies us that every great civilization believes itself to be exceptional, right up to the time it collapses. One of the main lessons to be learned from the collapse of past societies, as Diamond (2005, p. 509) points out, *“is that steep decline may begin only a decade or two after peak numbers, wealth and power have been reached”*. Toulmin (1977), a philosopher, in reviewing the history of ideas, noted that there are long periods where either analysis or synthesis dominates in society, with a pendulum swinging between these two eras. He believes that the Hellenic era (of early Greek history) and the Renaissance were ‘peaks of synthesis’, and that the pendulum is now swinging again toward synthesis. Sorokin, a sociologist, studied (in the 1940s) long periods of social change, and came to the conclusion that more materialistic eras alternate with more religious ones (in Ray and Anderson, 2000, pp. 246–247). As a society made the crossover between materialism and religious ideologies, he found a period of great uncertainty, where there could either be a flowering, as people made a creative synthesis of both views of reality or disintegration, with society refusing to acknowledge its limits, characterized by disarray in politics and institutions.

Toynbee (in Ateljevic, 2009) a historian analyzed the rise and fall of 23 civilizations in world history and claimed that when a culture shift occurs it is usually 5% of ‘creative marginals’ that prepare the shift in silence. Ghisi (2008) maintains that a ‘silent revolution’ is led by the growing numbers of ‘Cultural Creatives’ (Ray and Anderson, 2000), who create new values and who, without knowing it, are activating the 21<sup>st</sup> century paradigm. In some of his earlier writings he proposes what he calls a *“double hypothesis”*, that *“we are in transition to a transmodern way of thinking that combines intuition and spirituality with rational brainwork; and that 21st century conflicts will likely be not between religions or cultures but within them, between pre-modern, modern, and transmodern worldviews”* (Ghisi 1999).

Transmodernity is a term coined by the Spanish philosopher and feminist Rosa Maria Rodriguez (1989, in Ateljevic 2009). She employs a Hegelian logic whereby modernity, postmodernity and

Transmodernity form the dialectic triad that completes a process of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. As Ateljevic (2009) points out, Transmodernity is critical of modernity and postmodernity while at the same time it draws elements from both. In Ghisi's (2008) words the best of modernity is kept while at the same time we go beyond it. Interestingly, it is not a linear projection that takes us from (pre)modernity via postmodernity to Transmodernity, but rather transcends modernity in that it takes us trans, i.e. through, modernity into another state of being (Ateljevic, 2009). Gelter (2008) suggests that the new emerging paradigm is a mix on equal basis of rational and intuitive thinking. It is about spirituality, global consciousness, global diversity and interconnectedness, a shift in consumption, a social shift in values and global ecological awareness. Transmodernity opposes the endless economic progress and obsession with material wealth and instead promotes the concept of the quality of life as a measure of progress; the emphasis moves from material to human capital. It is also essentially post secular in a sense that it redefines a new relation between religions and politics in a way that re-enchants the world towards a new openness to spiritual guidance as a basis for 'private' behavior and 'public' policy, while rejecting religious divisions and dogmas. It aims in rediscovering the sacred as a dimension of our lives and societies. Ateljevic (2009) expounds that Transmodernity is about a joint effort of both men and women to fight for tomorrow's better world by rejecting values of control and domination.

### **2.3.3. Ecovillages and their role in the paradigm shift**

#### **2.3.3.1. Ecovillagers and their values**

The scope of the primary values that ecovillagers subscribe to is quite broad. These include ecology, equality, appropriate technology, self-sufficiency, right livelihood, humanist psychology, creativity, spirituality, and the pursuit of global peace (Kozeny 1996). Most members of ecovillages share a deep-felt concern about home, family, and neighborhood. These values are very much in line with those of the Cultural Creative as mentioned earlier. Therefore I argue that ecovillagers are Cultural Creatives. More often than not, people who consciously choose to live in an intentional community, like Cultural Creatives too, have parallel interests in ecology, personal growth, cooperation, and peaceful social transformation, pursuing the work necessary to change destructive attitudes and behaviors often taken for granted in the prevailing culture. They are people who walk their talk. Even if ecovillages have not achieved 'perfection' yet, I claim that they are on the way, on the path. . The development of ecovillages is a work in process, a fundamental dimension of a new paradigm that humanity is moving toward, and where much is yet to be learned (Kasper, 2008). According to Kozeny (1996) what is encouraging about many intentional communities is their tendency to be open to new ideas, their willingness to be tolerant of other approaches, and their commitment to live in a way that reflects their idealism.

#### **2.3.3.2. The ecovillage as a Model**

Many ecovillages serve as model environments or teaching centers for sustainable agriculture and appropriate technology etc. Most of these communities have not been satisfied with trying only to change a small piece of the world. Instead, they hope to provide a model that the rest of the world can take as a microcosmic example of the macrocosmic change they desire (Blouin, 2007). Gilman (1991) advocated that *"ecovillages must not become insular, exclusive, or sheltered but must interact with and integrate wholeheartedly with the surrounding culture."* Not retreatist or pessimistic about the fate of the planet or society, Gilman (1991) believed that ecovillages, and sustainable communities in general, must be the *"necessary yes,"* a positive *solution* to mounting global

problems. Dawson (2006) argues that the sharing of ideas, technologies, and way of life with a broader audience is a key function of ecovillages. He believes that *"what makes ecovillages especially effective as catalysts for change is that the primary objective of activities... is less to do with making life comfortable for ecovillage residents than demonstrating the viability of new, more ecologically benign approaches that they then promote and disseminate"* (Dawson, 2006 p. 43). Dawson (2006) explains that a lot of the attention that ecovillages get is directed towards the technological features they incorporate, that are subsequently often adopted by the wider society. But, Dawson (2006:54) also believes that *"ecovillagers themselves lay at least as much emphasis on the social dimension: the challenge of finding satisfactory and inclusive forms of community governance and wellbeing."* Strongin (2010) suggests that such communities are social innovators with sharing at the center of their capacity to reimagine human relationships between self and other and between individuals and collectives and thus, demonstrate the potential for greater openness and connectedness between people. Dawson (2006) advocates that the particular characteristics of ecovillages allows them to innovate more rapidly and more courageously which gives them more power as agents of change. One can say that ecovillages are innovatory global initiatives. Practically, these initiatives have motivated the introduction of sustainability principles in community design, shifted the mindsets of local planning authorities, and inspired a generation of new thinking and action (Cohen, 2010).

The ecovillage model suggests that the possibility of a sustainable society depends not only on what we do, but on how we think, and the understanding that these mutually influence one another. Concepts without practical applications are impotent, and actions not grounded in systems of belief are vulnerable to competing influences. The ecovillage paradigm is not only different from the dominant western worldview, it is an understanding of the world that is consciously articulated and embodied in ecovillage practices, relations, and the physical setting itself (Kasper, 2008).

According to Ross Jackson (2004), one of the founders of the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN), the ecovillage movement, while still in its early stages of development, is part of a global trend that is in opposition to the negative impacts of globalization. While the more visible responses seen within the anti-globalization or alter-globalization<sup>4</sup> (c.f. Krishna-Hensel, 2005) movements protest against the corporate dominated global economic model through street demonstrations and consumer boycotts, the ecovillage movement is actually about committed individuals who are quietly building small sustainable communities with the resources they have. These communities do not merely criticize the mainstream; they go a step further and enact residential lifestyle solutions based in communal cooperative values. Ecovillages, in this way, offer a lifestyle choice, and can be seen as models of how we can live, if the social and environmental threats to our society are to be taken seriously.

### **2.3.3.3. Outreach**

Perhaps the most important aspect of the global ecovillage movement is its commitment to education. Ecovillages can be seen as demonstration sites of sustainable living. Education is a real potential source of income for these often economically struggling communities. Some of the projects currently being conceptualized are: a curriculum for a new style of education to be taken in

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<sup>4</sup> Alter-globalization is the name of a social movement that supports global cooperation and interaction, but which opposes the negative effects of economic globalization, indicating an anti-capitalist and universalist perspective on globalization. Most members of this movement shun the label 'anti-globalization' as incorrect because they actively support human activity on a global scale and do not oppose economic globalization per se. 'The alter-globalization movement is a cooperative movement designed to protest the direction and perceived negative economic, political, social, cultural and ecological consequences of neoliberal globalization' (Krishna-Hensel 2005, p. 202). The name may have been derived from a popular slogan of the movement: 'Another world is possible', which came out of the World Social Forum, the largest forum for alter-globalization activity.

modules at different ecovillages and the creation of a common university. Such examples are the Gaia University that offers degrees as well as workshops on ecovillage related topics ([www.gaiauniversity.org/english/index.php](http://www.gaiauniversity.org/english/index.php)), and the development of 'Living and Learning Centers' ([www.gen.ecovillage.org/education/livinglearningcenters.html](http://www.gen.ecovillage.org/education/livinglearningcenters.html)). In 2000, GEN launched the 'Living Routes' program ([www.livingroutes.org/](http://www.livingroutes.org/)) that is accredited by the University of Massachusetts Amherst gives college students the chance to study abroad while living in an ecovillage as part of their formal education. Other initiatives currently in the works are: ecovillage tourism, an ecovillage design consultancy, complementary money systems, and ecovillage e-trade (Mare, 2000). Turner (2009) maintains that the key to spreading the ecovillage movement is educating others to alternative ways of life as well as allowing them the chance to experience ecovillage life in action.

I suggest that learning in an ecovillage can occur not only by attending formal courses or workshops with an outlined curriculum but also in a less institutionalized manner. This can be through simply getting involved in the everyday activities of the community by volunteering. Furthermore I suggest that learning can occur for both sides. It is not only the 'students' or volunteers that learn from the ecovillagers, but the visitors in the community can also bring in new ideas and knowledge. Furthermore the cooperation between visitors and residents, as well as the setting of the ecovillage that allows for experimentation can lead to innovation. In this study I will look at the ecovillage and the intentional community at large as a community of practice and examine its potentials for transformative learning. Therefore in the following sections I will discuss first the communities of practice and then transformative learning.

## **2.4. Communities of practice**

In recent years there has been coined the term 'communities of practice'. The origin and primary use of the concept has been in learning theory. The term has generally been attributed to social anthropologist Jean Lave (1991) and Etienne Wenger (1991; 1998; Wenger & Snyder, 2000) who studied apprenticeship as a learning model. Their study revealed that there is a complex set of social relationships through which learning takes place that goes beyond the relationship between student and mentor involving also more advanced apprentices. The community acts as a living curriculum for the apprentice. The basic argument made by Lave and Wenger (1991) is that communities of practice are everywhere and that we are generally involved in a number of them - whether that is at work, school, home, or in our civic and leisure interests.

The notion of communities of practice was first used by researchers to describe the way in which meaning was negotiated and reflected on in the practices of specific occupational groups e.g., architects, physicians, tailors, performing artists (Brown and Duguid, 1991; Lave & Wenger, 1991, in Wesley and Buysse, 2001). At the heart of the notion of communities of practice lies a key problematic: the acquisition of knowledge. It is axiomatic for the originators of the term that learning has a social and communal facet to it that exists quite distinct from learning at an individual and personal level. Learning, from this perspective, is a collective activity. The knowledge that is acquired is knowledge produced within the group – it is shared knowledge. And the process of acquiring knowledge is social – it is learnt through participation within the group and through the adoption of shared practices.(Denscombe, 2008)

Wegner (2009) defines a community of practice as a group of people who “*share a concern or a passion*” and “*engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor` and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly*”. A community of practice may or may not have an explicit agenda (Wenger & Snyder, 2000); the definition allows for, but does not assume, intentionality: learning can be the reason the community comes together or an incidental outcome of member's interactions (Wegner, 2009). People in communities of practice share their experience and knowledge in free-flowing, creative ways that foster new approaches to problems (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Among others communities of practice can drive strategy, solve problems, promote the spread of best practices and develop people's skills (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Lave and Wenger (1991) have demonstrated how the process of ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ in fairly stable and well-bounded ‘communities of practice’ enables individuals to acquire knowledge and skill and develop their understanding through contact with more experienced others.

In this study I suggest that ecovillages and intentional communities can be seen as communities of practice. These communities have a shared concern and foster knowledge transfer that often leads to innovation. More in specific I am going to explore the potential of these communities as grounds for transformative learning. Therefore in the following section I will look at the theorization of transformative learning.

## 2.5. Transformative Learning

Transformative learning is an attempt to conceptualize an inclusive educational process which describes the practice by which individuals within their social locations join together with each other and others in order to take action. It aims to empower people to feel more confident and take a leading role in formulating strategies that challenge oppressive situations and structures. Transformative learning theory has been conceptualized in several ways (Baumgardener, 2001).

Freire (2000) speaks of emancipatory education and believes that education is for the purpose of liberation. Through consciousness-raising, or “*conscientization*” (p. 17), learners came to see the world and their place in it differently. Empowered in their new perspective, they could act to transform their world.

Jack Mezirow (1991, 2000), a seminal theorist of transformative learning shares Freire's perspective that education should lead to empowerment. Furthermore they both take a constructivist approach to transformative learning. They believe that knowledge is not ‘out there’ to be discovered but is created from interpretations and reinterpretations in light of new experiences (Mezirow, 1996). The revised meaning results in what Mezirow calls a “*perspective transformation*,” which is characterized by a “*more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative perspective*” (Mezirow, 1990, p. 14). Mezirow concentrates on the importance of rational thought and reflection in the transformative learning process. Several fundamental components make up the recursive process that Mezirow delineates for perspective transformation. The process begins with a “*disorienting dilemma*” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 168), which is often a personal crisis. Next, people engage and in critical reflection and re-evaluate the assumptions they have made about themselves and their world. This happens when people “*realize something is not consistent with what [they] hold to be true*” (Taylor, 1998, p. 9). Reflections on their meaning perspectives or their overarching “*structure of assumptions*” or their meaning schemes, which include their beliefs and values or “*habitual, implicit rules for interpreting experience*,” can result in a perspective transformation or change in world view (Mezirow, 2000, p.2). Third, people engage in “*reflective discourse*” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 11). In short, they talk with others



about their new perspective to obtain consensual validation. Finally, action on the new perspective is imperative. In other words, not only seeing, but living the new perspective is necessary.

Mezirow has been criticized for ignoring the affective, emotional, and social context aspects of the learning process (Clark and Wilson, 1991; Lucas, 1994; McDonald, Cervero and Courtenay, 1999; Taylor, 1994). Not until his latest work (2000) does he acknowledge their importance in the meaning making process. Learning occurs *"in the real world in complex institutional, interpersonal, and historical settings [and] must be understood in the context of cultural orientations embodied in our frames of reference"* (p. 24). He realizes that there are *"asymmetrical power relationships"* that influence the learning process (p. 28). Last, Mezirow acknowledges that social interaction is important in the learning relationship.

Daloz (1986; 1999) has a developmental approach to transformative learning. He examines the interplay between education and development and realizes that students often are in a developmental transition and that they look to education to *"help them make sense of lives whose fabric of meaning has gone frayed"* (1999, p. 4). Daloz's narrative approach to transformative learning humanizes the transformational learning process as he shares stories of students' struggles. These tales demonstrate how students negotiate developmental transitions and are changed in the process.

Last but not least some scholars (Dirkx, 1997, 1998; Healy, 2000) make the link between spirituality and learning and believe that transformative learning has a spiritual dimension. Dirkx (1998) speaks of the role of imagination in facilitating learning through the soul and says that transformative learning goes beyond the ego-based, rational approach that relies on words to communicate ideas to an extra-rational, soul-based learning that emphasizes feelings and images.

According to Taylor (1998), Mezirow believes resolution of *"cognitive conflicts"* leads to transformation, while the spiritual view recognizes that resolving intrapsychic conflicts is the key (p. 13). Further, knowledge comes not through critical reflection but through symbols (Dirkx, 1998). Transformation is an extra-rational process that involves the integration of various aspects of the Self.

Cunningham (1992) suggests that critical transformative learning attempts to foster an individual's consciousness of himself or herself as situated within larger political and economic forces. The intent, then, of critical transformative learning is not just personal transformation but societal transformation so that individuals can be creative producers of self and of society and its political and economic relations (Allman & Wallis, 1990). Mayo (1999) maintains that the *raison d'être* of critical transformative learning is to provoke a change at the radix or root of social systems that will facilitate a *"move beyond the existing form"*.

An inclusive and integrative description of transformative learning is given by Morrell & O'Connor (2002, p. xvii). They described transformative learning as:

*a deep, structural shift in basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions...a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race, and*

*gender; our body-awareness, our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy.*

Travel as it provides all these aspects of learning I argue it can be regarded as form of education. Therefore in the next section I will explore the connection between travel and learning.

## 2.6. Travel and Learning

Learning has been an important travel motivation in the history of tourism, particularly as manifested in the Grand tour of Europe (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2002; Hall, 2005; Morrison, 1996; Towner, 1985, in Pearce, 2007). Educational travel motives and tourism products promoting learning persist today, not just in western countries but increasingly as factors affecting expanding youth markets in Asia (Lew, Yu, Ap, and Guangrui, 2003).

Travel according to Boorstin (196 pp. 84-85, in Cohen, 2010 p. 65) has been conceived as *“laborious or troublesome”* and the traveller *“was an active man at work”*. An association between work, travel and learning can be linked to the Grand Tours of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century in Europe. These tours, undertaken primarily by affluent young males, were depicted as a form of education, a finishing school in which travel was intended to increase one’s worldliness, social awareness and sophistication (Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995). This privileged class of mainly white, well-off European males (Galani-Moutafi, 2000) saw themselves as elite travellers that were enhancing their education rather than been driven by purely hedonistic motives. As Fussell (1980 p. 39, in Cohen, 2010) purports *“travel was conceived to be like study, and its fruits were considered to be the adornment of the mind and the formation of judgment”*. Besides the affluent upper-class youth of the Grand Tour there was the 19<sup>th</sup> century ‘tramp’, a working class , young adult male, who through vocational membership , followed a circuit of small-town craft society inns that supplied accommodation and work (Adler, 1985). Both the Grand Tour and the tramping system at the level of motivation ‘supplied a ritual separation from family to foment the transition into adulthood, as well as providing the opportunity for adventure and education (Adler, 1985).

Judith Adler (1985) argues that the lower-class tramp, wandering in quest of employment, became the formative model or trope for the emergent modern middle-class youth traveller, travelling for enjoyment and experiences. Some see the tramp as the precursor of what Cohen (1973) coined the drifter, a non-conventional traveller of the 1960s who travelled for extended period, without itinerary or timetable, associated with the counterculture movements of the times. The drifter paved the way for the modern backpacker and its image remains an ideal among them. One can argue that there is a thread from tramp to drifter to backpacker especially considering that today many backpackers combine their travels with a period of work abroad, whether to top up funds or to gain experience for their future careers. Although work is not as central to backpackers, it fits neatly into the break between education and career, building on the former and potentially enhancing prospects for the latter (O’Reilly, 2006). Travel can be good for the curriculum vitae in a number of ways, not just in terms of work experience gained on the road but also in demonstrating qualities that many employers find attractive (O’Reilly 2005).

As backpacking gradually moved into the margins of the mainstream and massive, it became also much more diverse (in motivations etc.). Nowadays we can speak of the flashpacker. Gap year tourism is another emerging phenomenon. It is travelling youth that takes a break from or before or

after studies in order to travel and discover the world and self. Many of the gap year travellers see travel as an enjoyable part of their education or as a period of fun and independence before taking on the roles responsibility. There is the belief that travel can lead to self-development and self-knowledge (O'Reilly, 2006).

Pearce (2007) in a study on backpacker learning notes that the literature on the educational benefits of travel relates to content knowledge about sites, settings and species rather than to the abilities and competencies of the viewing public (Ballantyne, Packer, & Beckman, 1998; Knudson, Cable, & Beck, 1995; Moscardo, 1998, in Pearce 2007). He takes a more interpretive approach and cites Kuh (1995, in Pearce, 2007) who noted that travel was a powerful contributor to generic skill development. Kuh argued that the skills required in out of class experiences were those required in an increasing number of jobs including leadership and a greater sensitivity to other cultures that can be of values in an expanding world of international business. Pearce concludes that backpacking can be seen as a kind of 'University of Travel', rich in educational opportunities and generic skill development possibilities. He notes that different learning outcomes are associated with different travel destinations and the long-term versus short-term learning achievements. Following Pearce I believe it is interesting to research the learning outcomes of travel destination such as an ecovillages and intentional communities.

Volunteer tourism can be seen as one more of the new branches of backpacker tourism, also closely associated with gap year tourism, as many gap year travellers engage in volunteer work during their travel. Volunteer tourism is closely related to learning while travelling. Furthermore volunteer tourists are of particular interest for this study as the participants of this research are volunteer tourists. Therefore in the following section I will delve into the volunteer tourism literature.

## 2.7. Volunteer tourism

Wearing (2002) defines volunteer tourists as those *"who, volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that may involve the aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or environment"*. While this definition is widely accepted in the academic literature as encompassing the ideological essence of volunteer tourism (Raymond & Hall, 2008), it uses criteria that limit volunteer tourism to those experiences located within the context of holidays or vacations (Lyons & Wearing, 2008). Uriely et al (2003) take a more macro-approach and consider volunteering in tourism as an *"expression of what is recognized in tourism literature as the 'other' dimension of postmodern tourism, which emphasizes the growing appeal of concepts such as 'alternative', 'real', and 'ecological', and 'responsible' forms of tourism"* (p. 61). McGehee and Santos (2005) define volunteer tourism as *"utilizing discretionary time and income to travel out of the sphere of regular activity to assist others in need"*.

Looking into the motivations to participate in volunteer tourism, altruistic motives appear to be central, a desire to undertake a holiday with a difference (Coghlan, 2006) and give back to the community (Brown, 2005). However, self-interest reasons are also an important motive for volunteer tourism (Stebbins, 1982), as are potential benefits to the volunteer worker (Sin, 2009)

The power of volunteer tourism to facilitate personal growth and self-awareness has also been documented as a key motivating factor for participation. Challenging and expanding themselves through interactions within the volunteer tourism experience, individuals are able to explore and

develop the 'self' through their altruistic efforts (Lepp, 2008; Matthews, 2008; Wearing, 2001). By assisting others, many participants' perception of 'life' and 'the world' is altered (McGehee & Santos, 2005), with the individual becoming more "*broad-minded, content and relaxed, and less selfish and psychocentric*" (Broad, 2003, p. 68). In addition, the importance of participating in volunteer tourism to further develop skills and experience has also been highlighted in the literature. This form of volunteering to help oneself, through fieldwork, research experience and the enhancement of curriculum vitae, may also motivate participation in volunteer tourism (Broad, 2003; Broad & Jenkins, 2008; Callanan & Thomas, 2005; Campbell & Smith, 2006; Clifton & Benson, 2006; Galley & Clifton, 2004; Ruhanen, Cooper and Fayos-Sola, 2008).

Social processes like working with people from different countries (Wearing, 2001), interacting with people of common interests and values (Brown, 2005; Raymond & Hall, 2008) and meeting local people and experiencing the local culture (Broad, 2003) have been identified to add meaning to the volunteer experience. Close interaction with the natural environment and working towards environmental enhancement through active and intense involvement are seen to be vital elements of the volunteer tourism experience (Wearing and Neil, 2000; Weiler and Richins, 1995). Through the provision of valuable opportunities to immerse themselves in local culture and environment (Brown, 2005; Brown & Morrison, 2003), volunteer tourists may be able to learn directly from local people and experience their culture (Broad, 2003). Greater understanding and appreciation for the local people and environment can also assist in the creation of the desired "authentic" experience (Brown, 2005).

According to Sin (2009) key motivators often revolve around the 'self', and intrinsic in this focus on the 'self' is the comparison with the 'other', where the 'other' can take on a range of characters, from the 'other' volunteer tourist, or the 'other' encountered in the volunteer experience, the locals in host-communities, the alternative/intentional community in our case. A study of motivations clearly illustrates desired identities of the 'self' in comparison to the 'other' and serves as a precursor to consider the tensions between desired outcomes of altruism, aid, and development in the host destination, versus personal development of the volunteer tourists.

Volunteer tourism is as much a journey of the self as it is a journey to help others. In some instances it is possible that volunteering can be life-changing and life-fulfilling but it can also cut one adrift from self-knowing to the sometimes unnerving words of self-discovery and self-doubt (Lyons, 2003 as cited in Wearing et al, 2008). Kelly (1983) suggests that contemporary life has forced individuals into having to conform to social expectations and roles. These roles provide little opportunity to get in touch with one's self. Kelly proposed that in leisure we can create and try on identities. Haggard and Williams (1991, in Wearing et al, 2008) extended the idea, suggesting that once a person participated in activities that promote certain image, these images become affirmed.

For some individuals, being a volunteer tourist provides the opportunity to undergo a 'rite of passage' and display independence from others while seeking new experiences possibly unavailable at home. Being in the context of 'otherness' and removed from the influence of traditional reference groups may encourage the individual to think more for him/herself and assume proactive role in decision making. In doing so, the individual must assume responsibility for his/her actions – right or wrong (Heller, 1970) – and, in the process, learn to be independent and cope. Fusell (in Craik, 1986) point out that the experience of travel is interconnected with self-discovery, therein illustrating that

the effects of volunteer tourism on one's development of self may indeed be quite profound and carried on into all other aspects of one's life. (Wearing et al, 2008, p. 69)

Change and transformation of individuals through volunteer tourism is inevitable from a postmodern perspective because the world itself in which volunteer tourism is located is destabilized. From a more modernist perspective such as that taken by Cohen (1979) only specific tourism contexts evoke short-term or long-term changes in the individual while some do not.

Cohen's experimental and existential modes of tourism experiences are relevant to our consideration of journey into the self through volunteer tourism experiences. They characterize the type of experience which makes possible a journey of self-discovery and self-understanding through the search for, and experience of life alternatives. It is the adoption of different contexts of 'other' places and people and the relative freedom offered to individuals in volunteer tourism that 'makes possible the investment of self that leads to the fullest development of ourselves, the richest expression of who we want to become, and the deepest experience of fulfillment' (Kelly, 1996, p.45, in Wearing et al, 2008, p. 70).

While a novel setting is important, it is the reflection which the setting is triggering that results in new discoveries (Lepp, 2008). Reflection is the key to benefiting from novel experiences (Lee et al, 1994; Priest and Glass, 1997 as cited in Lepp, 2008)

At this point I want to highlight what I see as a gap in the so far existing volunteer tourism literature. First is that the setting of an ecovillage or intentional community for volunteer tourism is unique. Up to this date there has been research on nature based tourism and community based tourism, but none in a community that has been intentionally created for the purpose of living according to ideal that revolve around sustainable living. Moreover, most of the research in this field has focused either on the project and the structure, or on profiling the volunteering tourist (Brown and Morrison, 2003; Wearing, 2003). Lately, as Brown (2005) notes there has been increasing interest in understanding volunteers' motives and the benefits derived. Researchers are beginning to investigate volunteer tourism from a number of perspectives, including market value (Brown and Morrison 2003), global contribution (Ellis 2003; Singh 2002; Wearing 2001), best practice (Wearing 2004), and impacts on aspects of participant's live (Halpenny and Caissie 2003; McGehee 2002; McGehee and Norman 2002; Wearing 2000). In this research endeavor I aspire to portray the impact of the volunteer experience on the travellers' self from volunteering in a very special setting, that is the intentional community. More in specific it is transformative learning that I am interested in. Learning as a result of travelling has been researched before as we saw above (see tourism and learning). However my intention is to unravel the potential for learning while travelling in a very specific setting and context, which is the ecovillage or intentional community.

## 3. Empirical Context: The Case of Sadhana Forest

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### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter aims in introducing the reader to the case study that has been selected for the purpose of this study. The case study where I carried out my field work is called Sadhana Forest and is one among the many communities that exist in Auroville, an intentional township in South India. Auroville comprises of many communities and smaller projects scattered in a rather wide area, that includes also Indian villages that where there even before Auroville came into existence. All these projects may vary in focus, scope, size and many other aspects but one could claim that what they all have in common is Auroville's vision and purpose that is eloquently summarized in its Charter. Below I will give a background description of Auroville; how it came into being, what its vision and purpose are, and how it has evolved. Then I will introduce Sadhana Forest. First I will give some information of what the project is about, how it started, and on what principles it is based. Then I will give a more detailed account of the everyday life during my fieldwork, which allows the reader to gain a better understanding of this type of experience that I myself, my interviewees and other volunteers engaged in. Later I will try to go one level deeper and show some of the more intrinsic aspects of the volunteering experience in Sadhana Forest that unravel some of the more subtle processes that characterize its dynamic.

### 3.2. Auroville

Auroville (City of Dawn) is an experimental universal township located in the South of India, in the state of Tamil Nadu, close to Pondicherry. The town was founded in 1968 by a French woman Mirra Alfassa, also known as "The Mother" and based on the teachings of Sri Aurobindo which promoted the notion of human unity. Sri Aurobindo born in Calcutta, received an English education in the U.K. and upon his return to India joined the liberation movement. A turning point in his life was his imprisonment with the accusation of sedition and conspiracy. In prison he did intensive inner work leading to a number of spiritual experiences. Eventually he withdrew from politics; he became a yogi and moved to Pondicherry. It was there, in 1914 that The Mother met Sri Aurobindo for the first time and immediately recognized in him the figure of the great guide who had repeatedly appeared in her visions. Due to the war she had to leave India for France and after some years spent in Japan she returned to Pondicherry in 1920 and never left again. In 1926 when Sri Aurobindo withdrew to his room she took over the ashram.

The concept of Auroville - an ideal township devoted to an experiment in human unity - came to the Mother as early as the 1930s. In 1954 she wrote about her dream:

*"There should be somewhere on earth a place which no nation could claim as its own, where all human beings of goodwill who have a sincere aspiration could live freely as citizens of the world and obey one single authority, that of the supreme truth; a place of peace, concord and harmony where all the fighting instincts of man would be used exclusively to conquer the causes of his sufferings and miseries, to surmount his weaknesses and ignorance, to triumph over his limitations and incapacities; a place where the needs of the spirit and the concern for progress would take precedence over the*

*satisfaction of desires and passions, the search for pleasure and material enjoyment."*  
(<http://www.auroville.org/vision/adream.htm>)

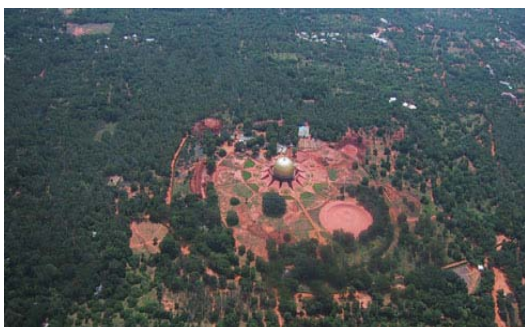
In the mid-1960s the Sri Aurobindo Society in Pondicherry proposed to her that such a township should be started. She gave her blessings. The concept was then put before the Government of India, who gave their backing and took it to the General Assembly of UNESCO. In 1966 UNESCO passed a unanimous resolution commending it as a project of importance to the future of humanity, thereby giving their full encouragement. On 28<sup>th</sup> of December 1968 Auroville was inaugurated and The Mother spoke the Charter:

- *Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But to live in Auroville one must be a willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.*
- *Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress and a youth that never ages.*
- *Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realizations.*
- *Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual Human Unity.*

(<http://www.sriarobindosociety.org.in/subnav/aurovil.htm#purpose>, accessed: 2011, June 14)

Auroville is a universal township in the making for a population of up to 50,000 people from around the world. In the words of The Mother (<http://www.auroville.org/index.htm>) :

*"Auroville wants to be a universal town where men and women of all countries are able to live in peace and progressive harmony, above all creeds, all politics and all nationalities. The purpose of Auroville is to realize human unity"*



In my view The Mother realized that an ashram life devoted to inner growth is not the way for everybody hence humanity would not be able to function if all chose such a lifestyle. As She said: *"The old spirituality was an escape from life towards the divine Reality, leaving the world where it was, as it was. Our new vision, on the contrary, is the divinization of life, the transformation of the material into a divine world."*

There should be a place where the inner meets the outer, the material meets the spiritual. Therefore she placed great importance on Karma Yoga, namely service. One should bring spirituality into his everyday life. Sri Aurobindo believed that *"man is a transitional being, he is not final. Evolution is not finished; reason is not the last word, nor the reasoning animal the supreme figure of Nature. There is something that he is not yet which he has to be"* (<http://www.auroville.org/vision/Greetings.htm>). Auroville is a place where one can work towards this goal.

In line with The Mother's vision, in the center of Auroville, in the peace area is the Matrimandir (in Sanskrit the Temple of The Mother) which is seen as the soul of the city. It was conceived by The

Mother as *"a symbol of the Divine's answer to man's inspiration for perfection"* ([http://www.auroville.org/thecity/matrimandir/mm\\_soul.htm](http://www.auroville.org/thecity/matrimandir/mm_soul.htm)). Inside the Matrimandir a spiraling ramp leads upwards to an air-conditioned chamber of polished white marble. *"A place to find one's consciousness"*, silence is maintained inside. At the center of the Matrimandir is a 70cm crystal ball in a gold mount that glows with a single ray of sunlight that is directed on the globe from the top of the structure. According to The Mother it represents *"a symbol of future realization"*. Radiating from this center are four 'zones' of the City Area: the 'Residential Zone', 'Industrial Zone', 'Cultural Zone' and 'International Zone'. Around these four zones, lies a Green Belt which is an environment for research and a resource area that includes farms and forest communities, a botanical garden, seed banks, medicinal and herbal plants, water catchments bunds and other.

Today Auroville is recognized as the first and only internationally endorsed ongoing experiment in human unity and transformation of consciousness, also concerned with - and practically researching into - sustainable living and the future cultural, environmental, social and spiritual needs of mankind. ([http://www.auroville.org/av\\_brief.htm](http://www.auroville.org/av_brief.htm)). Auroville is a pioneer in many emerging fields such as reforestation, green technology, alternative architecture, organic farming and integral education. Designated as an ecovillage in 1995 Auroville's larger vision is to be a living laboratory for research, exploration and experimentation toward the evolution of humankind. People from all corners of the world come to Auroville to learn and share their knowledge. It is a place where the seed of what might seem a crazy idea to the rest of the world has the potential to grow in its fertile land.

That is not to say that Auroville is a perfect place. Greed, jealousy, small town gossip might be encountered like in any other community, as every community comprises of humans that are in various stages of evolution and therefore have to continue working on themselves in order to reach perfection. Nevertheless what Auroville has reached in its 43 years of existence is at least impressive. First of all only the fact that it still exists and has not vanish like many utopian communes that sprang out of the hippie movement of the 60s has something to say. The pioneers, the first Aurovillians came to turn with their hard work a barren land into a green oasis with forest, farms, schools, places for sports, arts and culture, research centers and so much more.

Visitors to Auroville are many in numbers and diverse in many aspects. These can be nationality, age, budget, motivations, and time in disposal. There are large numbers of mostly Indians but also westerns who come to see the Matrimandir, a place for meditation, on a day visit. Yet these people come and leave without sensing the essence of what Auroville is about. It seems that Aurovillians are rather annoyed but those people and some Aurovillians try to manage this type of tourism in a way that it has the lowest possible negative effect on Auroville. Besides the short term visitors there are many who come to Auroville and stay for several weeks and get engaged in the happenings of the place. Here we can see a beautiful and dynamic exchange of ideas, knowledge, skills between visitors and Aurovillians. Visitors come to learn, but Aurovillians learn as well, as the visitors bring in from outside new ideas and practices. There is high exchange and much potential for innovation. This way also something enables something born in Auroville to spread around the world so that more people can benefit from it.

### **3.3. Sadhana Forest**

Sadhana Forest in the southern west outskirts of Auroville is an ambitious reforestation project and one of the newest and most vibrant communities of Auroville. It was founded on 19<sup>th</sup> of December



2003, the day of the Jewish Light festival, by an Israeli couple, Aviram and Yorit, who set the founding philosophy and values. They put their life's savings of \$63000 earned from their work as professionals in business and architecture into the project. Their mission was the reforestation of 70 acres of severely eroded, infertile land of once a Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest. This type of forest is found only in South India and Sri Lanka (only 0.01% of the original habitat remains) and provides rare biological richness due to its very high species abundance. At that time, Aviram and Yorit, had practically no knowledge of forestry but in the light of what Auroville is about, human unity, constant learning, a place of renewal, innovation, and adventure, they took on this ambitious project to create biodiversity, improve people's lives, and an opportunity to practice human unity. As a priority, they created earthen dams to prevent the water from the rain to flow away from the site and then they started planting trees. More than 18,200 trees of indigenous variety have so far been planted with the labor and love of volunteers, from every corner of our planet. The trees have an exceptionally high viability rate of up to 95%. A system of earthen dams and a mud pool that also makes a natural swimming hole and other systems of water conservation, such as pits and bunding have raised the local underground water table by about 6 meters.

Sadhana Forest, although named as such, is not yet a fully-fledged forest, though it is on the way to becoming one. Sadhana in Sanskrit means spiritual work.

Volunteers are invited to come and help with the project and experience in a practical way what sustainability and community means. This experience resembles to what Auroville was like 30 years ago during its pioneering days. Volunteers are offered accommodation in return for a 25 hour work week with additional community responsibilities. Accommodation is provided in a series of simple huts and dormitories with no walls, they are a frame of granite pillars and logs with a steeply raked canvas roof. As Sadhana Forest is a nonprofit ecological project that does not generate any income it cannot afford to provide free food. Therefore volunteers are requested to contribute 150 rupees for the communal 100% vegan meals that are served thrice a day. Free facilities for volunteers include a small swimming pool, free 24/7 unlimited access to the internet, 5 hours each day (excluding Fridays) of AC power to charge electrical items (sun permitting), a small collection of books, the use of several bicycles and a playground for children. There are also daily workshops that are run by volunteers. Volunteers mainly work on modifying the land for water conservation, plant, mulch and water trees according to season, work in the little vegan-organic vegetable garden, maintain the community area, and spend time with the community children. Volunteers are welcomed to stay for a minimum of 2 weeks and a month during high season (December to March) so it functions more fluidly. Volunteers should not take drugs or consume alcohol during their stay in Sadhana Forest whether inside or outside and not bring inside the property any non-vegan or processed foods. There used to be a designated cigarette smoking area just outside the living compound. On arrival volunteers are given environmentally friendly soap, shampoo and toothpaste. Body soap is biodegradable, toothpaste is powder from the neem tree, washing detergent is soap from nuts from a local tree called *Sapindus trifoliatum*.

Life in Sadhana Forest is very simple and based on a consciousness of the connection between humans and nature. Aviram does not see a conflict between human development and the health of the planet. To him by integrating the planet in our thoughts and in our daily life we will realize the importance of Mother Earth. Sadhana Forest strives for non-violence and sustainability. Sadhana Forest is a vegan community. A vegan is a person who avoids the use of any animal products for nourishment or for any other purpose. Vegans do not eat meat, fish, eggs, dairy (milk) products, honey, or any other animal products. The primary motivation in Sadhana Forest to be vegan is to reduce animal suffering. One more reason for Sadhana Forest to be vegan is that when animals are bred on a large scale for people to eat or milk, then, apart from the question of the animals' production of "greenhouse" gases, given the universal shortage of land, it is probable that some forest will have to be destroyed to make way for a monoculture for grazing. Processed foods are also not allowed because of the unethical practices of corporations in their way of production etc. and for health reasons. Sadhana does not use sugar for ethical reasons; jaggery (a sweetener that comes from palm and is produced locally) can be used instead. In general products are organic and locally produced when possible. Oil is not used. Hot spices such as chilies are also not used in cooking as they are rajastic (one of the three qualities in Ayurveda) because they are believed to induce aggressiveness and make people more confrontational.



Sadhana Forest tries to practice non-violence in all aspects of life. Competitive games, such as chess or any team game that has a winner and a loser are not allowed. This is for the reason that competition does not fit with Sadhana's value system. This rule might trigger volunteer's creativity to invent or modify games that do not contain the competitive element. In this way volunteers are invited to imagine a world without competition. Non-violent

communication is being practiced as well. According to Yorit (2010, personal communication) there have never been any arguments or raised voices in Sadhana. She believes that a big part of this is due to the veganism that is been practiced and that *"even though one may not be aware of the subconscious pain we feel from the suffering of the animals before they became a product, the peace between so many volunteers from such varied backgrounds speaks for itself"* Yorit (2010, personal communication).

In respect to sustainability Sadhana Forest is striving to implement permaculture principles. Everything is set up to minimize harmful effects in ways both large and small. Toilets are dry composting ones designed in such a way as to turn human waste into excellent compost for plants. Kitchen waste is also turned into compost. Gardens grow on runoffs of grey water (i.e. from showers, laundry, hand wash stations, toilets etc.) The kitchen has a low-tech, highly efficient, wood-burning *Rocket* stove that burns about one fifth of the wood compared with local traditional stoves, cooks much more quickly and produces very little smoke and waste. The wood comes from dead trees from the forest. Electricity to run lights and computers and to allow the recharging of the numerous gadgets that volunteers bring with them is from solar or human kinetic power sources, nothing from the grid. Water is pumped by hand and intelligently conserved. There is an ingenious but simple

method for drastically reducing wastage of water when washing hands. Huts are built with local wood and thatch, and granite that is extracted by hand from mountains.

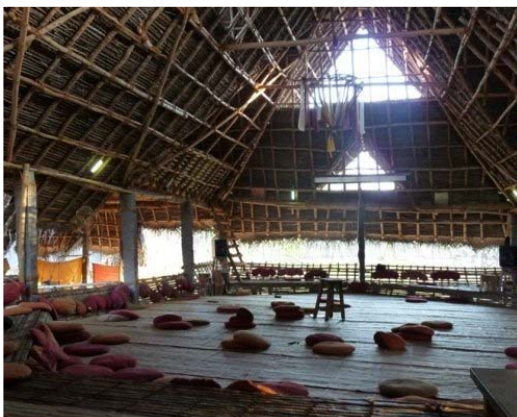
Sadhana Forest runs on a gift economy model, which means that there is no direct monetary or other exchange. It is not like a market economy (money) or a barter economy (commodity or service) where you give something in return for something else. It is more like a triangle model, where one offers something e.g. one's labor, knowledge or something material without expecting something in direct return. The giver might receive something else from a third person or even the receiver, but it is not in return for something.

One more particularity of Sadhana Forest is that the children living there do not go to school, instead they do unschooling. Unschooling centers on allowing children to learn through their natural life experiences, whether this is games, work, social interaction or something else. A fundamental premise of unschooling is that curiosity is innate and that children want to learn. Children should be taught something when they explicitly ask for it.

### 3.4. One typical day in Sadhana Forest

Sadhana Forest is an organically growing and evolving community. Volunteers are encouraged to be creative and take initiative. Ideas to improve the project and the community are welcomed. It is the people who make the community and since the people are changing the community is changing as well, and so does the everyday life there with all what it contains from the social life to the physically environment. Also one important factor influencing the everyday life is the climate, e.g. only during the second monsoon, in October and November there are actually trees being planted. Below I will give a description of what the everyday life was like at the time that I was there doing my fieldwork, in the period of March 2010. March is the beginning of spring, and the end of the cool period. It is

still dry, but it starts getting hot and slowly more and more humid. Also March is the end of the high tourist season, although it is still pretty busy. During the high season minimum stay for volunteer in Sadhana is 1 month, from March on it is two weeks. At the time that I arrived in Sadhana there were about 150 volunteers and the numbers started gradually dropping to around 100 at the time I left 3.5 weeks later. Next I will describe a typical day in Sadhana Forest.



The main hut, empty...

#### Morning call

From 5:30 a few volunteers would go around the huts to wake up the rest of the volunteers. Usually they would play some music instrument, or sing. The most popular was one German guy who would play his ukulele and sing. He was supposedly broadcasting what



...with people

he called radio Sadhana, a radio that was very different from all other radio, bringing only positive news. So he would make up the craziest and most positive stories about beautiful things happening around the world. And make us jump out of our rope beds with a smile on our faces.

### Morning circle

Around 6:00 when everybody was awake we would gather in front of the main hut and we would make the morning circle. Hold hands, sing a song all together, play a short game, hug each other, etc. So we would start the day with a smile, a feeling of belongingness and unity.

### 1st work

The first working shift starts at 6:30. After the morning circle everybody except for the breakfast cooking crew would go to the tool shed, gather what we needed and make our way into the forest. As mentioned earlier the planting of the trees takes place only in the months of October and November when there is rain, so the newly planted trees have plenty of water for the first one or two months because after they have to survive several months of intense heat without a drop of rain. Thus the rest of the year the forest work revolves mostly around water conservation and preparation for the monsoon. That means making bunds, mounds of compacted earth to stop the water when the rain comes from flowing away so it percolates and eventually raises the aquifer. To be more specific what we were actually doing was digging ponds that will hold the water when the rain will come and the earth that comes out of the ponds goes into the making of the bunds. As the ponds get deeper one volunteer will be inside breaking the soil with a pickaxe a second volunteer will scoop the earth up with a mummy into a chetty or a basket and then pass it to somebody standing outside. A human chain is formed there to pass the soil in the chetty or basket to the point where the bund is built. There it is tipped out, spread evenly and then tamped down by many feet shuffling sideways along the top. Another job is making swales that is excavating trenches, so that the water flows in and can better percolate. These techniques help the water to percolate both horizontally and vertically so that it eventually reaches the aquifer and raise the underground water table. In addition they prevent water erosion and the run off of the topsoil and the organic matter that is so precious for plants and life in general.

### Breakfast

At 8:30 everybody stops working and gathers at the main hut where breakfast is being served. A few people from the crowd usually volunteer to help the people who had been cooking to serve the food to everybody. Nobody starts eating before everybody has been served. Then announcements are made. For example if somebody wants to give a workshop, or wants to say something that the community should know about, or just wants to request something. People used to do the announcements themselves, but at some point it was decided that it is better if the person that wants to make an announcement tells what he or she wants to say to one of the long term volunteers who is appointed for the announcements on that specific day and then the long term volunteer does all the announcements. The reason for this is that volunteers are coming from many different countries and speak English with different accents, not everybody has a good level of English so sometimes people don't understand. The long term volunteers make an extra effort in speaking slow and as clear as possible. After all that and while all hungry people have been waiting patiently, there is a minute of silence. It is not a prayer but a minute one can express her or his gratitude for the delicious food that has been cooked with love by fellow volunteers.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> circle

After breakfast and a little chit chat around 9:30 there is a second gathering in front of the main hut, with some singing and coming together little games to prepare people for second work.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> work

By the time of the 2<sup>nd</sup> work the sun is already high in the sky and it is too hot to work under its strong rays. Second work is in or around the living compound and it is more about community maintenance, maintaining the showers, toilets, laundry areas and kitchen. And of course cooking, and washing the pots from the previous cooking.

Examples of work shifts are:

Kitchen: Usually two people volunteer to be head chef and take turns rotating shifts while 4 to 6 volunteer as kitchen assistance. They usually end up chopping vegetables and then clean up the kitchen. There is also a shift for someone to be the fire starter who starts and maintains the fire for the Rocket stove. There is a shift for several people to bring the pots and pans in from the main hut after the meal and wash all pots and pans used to prepare the meal. Each volunteer washes her or his own dishes by using a minimal amount of water and biodegradable products for cleaning such as ash and vinegar. Someone needs to organize the veggies and fruits twice a week so that the older vegetables go on top of the new ones and get used up first

Gardening: This totally depends on what is most important and pressing for that day. These can be tasks like watering the vegetable gardens, cutting grass or wood or gathering branches or cutting bigger logs for the fire for cooking. Spraying plant with natural products such as tobacco or neem extract mixed with water to keep pest and fungus off the plants. Mulching that is putting dried leaves and sticks to cover the area around a plant so to help lock in moisture and keep the topsoil from running off.

Solar Panels: the panels have to be rotated 4 times a day so that the sun is always hitting them. The entire community runs on solar energy which includes: several power outlets for volunteers to use to recharge batteries, laptops; the projector and laptop for movie night; florescent lights in the main hut, kitchen and a few of the bathroom stalls at night (the huts for sleeping have no power just the main hut and kitchen).

Hygiene: Taking care of the compost; filling up water containers in toilets and hand wash stands, maintaining shower, toilet, laundry areas.

## Lunch

After 2<sup>nd</sup> work is lunch time and after that volunteers are free, unless they are assigned for some other work, e.g. cooking for dinner, or cleaning after dinner. Every volunteer has to take one afternoon shift in a week and one shift any time in the weekend. In the afternoon there are usually one or more workshops given by volunteers. As there are volunteers from all over the world everyone seems to have a special talent or skill that they can share with others. Workshops range from capoeira, Tai Chi, creative writing, jamming and dance to Thai massage or Mayan astrology.

Quite regularly there are also workshops related to language and culture like Japanese, Israeli, French, English etc.

### Dinner

In the evening there is dinner, always except for Thursday. After dinner there might be some activities like singing and music, one day a week there is open stage, when everybody who wants can perform.

### Special days

Every Friday there is the so called Eco Film Club. The community invites visitors first to a guided tour where the main features of the project are presented and the visitors may learn something of the joys and travails in this great experiment. After the tour a movie is shown, usually a documentary related to environmental and social issues. Then visitors and volunteers get a vegan meal. The Friday movie night is a way to present the project and the values of the community while offering entertainment that also raises awareness about environmental and social issues and introduce vegan cuisine.

Every Sunday night after dinner there is a community sharing meeting. The whole community, all the volunteers and the founders come together in a circle in the main hut and everybody says a few things about oneself, and shares her or his emotions and experiences of the week. Often really deep issues come out and people find themselves sharing things with so many people that they know for such a little while. It can be a very cathartic and therapeutic experience. After the sharing circle, the jobs of the week are assigned. If somebody wants to have a specific job for the week, like firestarter, chef, termite team (repairing holes in the huts made by termites), rat catcher (putting traps to catch the rat and then take the cage in the forest and release the rat), this is the time to assign for it. One



other special job is related to Childrensland, which is a project lead by two long term volunteers. The Childrensland is physically next to the living compound and before the forest. It is a space where the children from the surrounding villages can come and engage in various activities and games and constitutes one of the ways for outreach. Also once a week the team of the Childrensland goes in the village and plays games with the children there. During my stay there was one more project going on in which I participated. It was related

to natural and alternative building. It was the building of the so-called eco dome, a small structure out of sand bags that is meant to become a place for meditation. At the time that I was there, we were in the phase of plastering the walls with a mixture of clay and coconut fiber.

During my stay one new idea was implemented. That was a sort of communal mediation. Basically we decided that for Monday's 1<sup>st</sup> shift and Friday's 2<sup>nd</sup> shift we will not work. Instead we will all gather at the Childrensland's area and we will sit all together in silence. We were free to choose what we would do; it could be meditation, read a book, or anything else as long as we were there and silent. After 45 min we could choose to go on a silent meditative walk in the forest, practice yoga, tai chi or anything else we wanted; or form a group and discuss about one or more subjects.



### 3.5. What is special about the volunteer experience in Sadhana Forest?

Sadhana Forest offers an experience which is very much in contrast with the Western, competitive and consumerist lifestyle. Volunteers are invited to learn what it is like to live simple, more lightly and more sustainably, using appropriate technologies while working on such a noble cause that is the regeneration of the Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest. But reafforestation is only one thing that is happening in Sadhana. As Aviram said *"We started the project to plant trees and it became clear early that there is another process that is happening here, that is the growth of people, transformation and change of people and that became also a major part of the project."* One of the volunteers Katrina from Switzerland once said: *"may there be many forests to grow people"*. That became sort of the motto of Sadhana Forest, as Aviram believes that this sentence gives a very deep understanding of what is happening there. He thinks that if people come to Sadhana Forest with an open mind, and sometimes they even come with a closed mind, but their mind opens when they see other people that are open to experiences, open to hear about other ways of living or thinking or doing stuff, then they benefit a lot from their stay there and not less than the trees benefit. In Aviram's words:

*"I think everybody takes from Sadhana forest what they can take at that point of time. If they feel they haven't taken enough they come back again and they take more and they come for second or third or fifth and they take more. One of our volunteers said "Sadhana forest is like my petrol station... you know inspiration or whatever ...I come from the west for inspiration to Sadhana to fill up on the inspiration station. To get inspired to make again changes. "*

Aviram feels that he provides people with an experience they need. Because in his view the experience they have in the west is not meaningful enough, they don't see that there is a future in this experience. Hickman (2000, in(Hay 2005) calls this lack of meaning creeping into Western society soul sickness. Aviram recounts:

*"They see their parents and their parents are ageing, a little bit sick...superseded...unhappy, working 9 to 5 and they don't have that much money most of them, it's not that they became millionaires, they just work a lot to sustain their basic middle class or upper middle class life. So I am trying to supply them with what they need, that meaning, show them the experience of Sadhana Forest."*

The essence of the experience in Sadhana Forest, Aviram sees it, as a collection of alternatives to the ways that one is used to do things. For example everybody goes to school when a child. No says Aviram *"it doesn't have to be like this, one can do unschooling as it happens in Sadhana Forest. Everybody gives birth in hospital; no you can give birth at home. Everybody gives vaccinations to their children, no some people don't, they trust the immune system of their children. Everybody works only for money. No people can work also for free and be very happy with their life. There is only one business model I give you something and you give me money, equivalent money. No there are different business models. I can be a gift economy which is I give you something you don't give me anything back but somebody else gives me or he doesn't give me and then it doesn't work and that's also ok. If you*



*plant trees you have to cut them and sell them for wood or something like this. No you plant trees and leave them for your children and they will be happy, they will have shade and fruits. "*

To Aviram the essence of the experience of volunteering in Sadhana Forest is to question everything one is doing and to acknowledge that there are alternatives too. *"It doesn't mean that you have to adopt these alternatives. It doesn't mean anything. It just means that there are alternatives. And you choose whatever alternatives you like. Maybe you don't like homebirth, maybe you like going to the hospital...So, yeah open people's minds to alternatives, that's what Sadhana forest is about. Without trying to convert them to this...it's not about the right or wrong way, it's just there are different ways. And you can choose your own."*

In the West, Aviram argues, we employ so many ways to distract ourselves from ourselves; we distract ourselves from feeling what we are feeling, observing ourselves from introspection. In Sadhana Forest he maintains these distractions do not exist. *"There is no TV or shopping mall that one can and all these ways we use in order to suppress our emotions. Every time we feel sad we go to a mall we buy something, we eat something, we put on the TV so we don't have to face our emotions. And because this doesn't exist here, I think that a lot of stuff is coming out. And I think it's wonderful.*

*It's difficult but I think it's the only way to transform yourself and go further than you go with all the suppressing that the west offers"*



A meditation retreat like a 10 day Vipassana<sup>5</sup> course offers a similar experience, Aviram believes, the classical defense, the ways to distract oneself, to not encounter one's emotional mechanisms do not exist or are less active. The difference, Aviram maintains, lies in that Sadhana Forest is a real place where people live and that confronts one with even more questions about one's way of life. The great number of people one lives with in Sadhana Forest and the close proximity within which they all live

may function as a mirror. One can see one's mirror reflection in another person. This can show the beautiful and the dark sides of one's personality.

Another major aspect of the experience of living and volunteering in Sadhana Forest is the relationship to nature. Aviram thinks that Sadhana Forest is a lab for raising environmental awareness. *"It is happening every moment just by living there, people become aware of how much water they are using, how much energy it takes to plant a tree versus buying furniture that contains this tree. People become aware of where their energy comes from by turning the solar panels, sometimes there is power sometimes not."* This is a huge revelation for most people. As they have never given it a second thought where the power from the switch on the wall comes from and what are the consequences etc.

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<sup>5</sup> Vipassana is an ancient technique of sitting meditation, the inception of which is attributed to Gautama Buddha. It is a practice of self-transformation through self-observation and introspection to the extent that sitting with a steadfast mind becomes an active experience of change and impermanence.



Sadhana is an ideal environment to learn to measure and reduce one's Carbon Footprint. The question is how these inputs from a very simple living in Sadhana Forest can be translated into the life the volunteer will return to back home in the West.

"I think they can do small changes, you know. And they can inspire others to do changes." was Aviram's reply.

To sum up I would describe the experience of volunteering in Sadhana Forest as an opportunity to experience community life while working on the restoration of the Earth. People are confronted with novel situations, physically and mentally. These include simple living, like sleeping in huts without walls or electricity, taking bucket showers with water they have pumped by hand and carried all the way to the shower, changing diet, sharing space. I would argue that the physical has an impact on the mental. So, putting all this effort in taking a shower makes one think of the simple action of taking a shower in whole different way. Furthermore Sadhana Forest triggers one mentally, not only by offering so much new information but also in showing that there are alternatives to the usual ways of thinking and doing things, and that there are living examples for that. Moreover emotionally it can be an intense experience, as people are taken out of their usual comfort zone and are encouraged to explore new domains of their self, which might be much truer to their real self to the point that they can ignite what one can call spiritual experiences.

## 4. Methodology Chapter

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### 4.1. Introduction

This chapter sets out to provide an insight into the methodological setting of this study and explain the methods that have been used for the collection and analysis of the data. First I will try to clarify some of the terms that we will come across in this chapter such as methodology, method, paradigm and qualitative research. Then I present the paradigm that will guide me through this study, namely the constructivist paradigm. After, I describe the case study approach and the methods of data collection that in my case are: participant observation, semi structured interviews and a reflective post-experience question that have been emailed to me. Then I will portray the method of data analyses. I finish with my own reflexivity presenting my positionality as a researcher and a young traveller seeking to learn through long-haul travel.

### 4.2. Methodology, Methods and Paradigm

A methodology *“is a model, which entails theoretical principles as well as a framework that provides guidelines about how research is done in the context of a particular paradigm”* (Sarantakos 1998, p.32; see also Stanley & Wise 1990, p.26, in Jennings, 2001, p.34). Guba (1990) sees the term 'methodology' as part of the structure that constitutes a paradigm. The term 'paradigm' is associated with Thomas Kuhn to whom a paradigm is *“the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques shared by members of a given community”* of inquirers (1970, p. 175, cited in Ayikoru 2009, p.65). Paradigm according to Guba (1990) is *“a basic set of beliefs that guides action, whether of the everyday garden variety or action taken in connection with a disciplined inquiry”*. Methods are *“the tools or instruments employed by researchers to gather empirical evidence or to analyze data”* (Sarantakos 1998, p.32; see also Stanley & Wise 1990, p.26, cited in Jennings 2001, p. 34).

#### 4.2.1. Qualitative Research

As this research project has a qualitative approach I would like to shortly elaborate on what is qualitative research. Traditionally qualitative research has been viewed as a set of different research methods that is distinct from quantitative research as it does not produce quantified findings or have measurement and hypothesis testing as an integral part of the research process (Phillimore and Goodson, 2004). However those who view qualitative research merely as a set of methods rather than a distinct research strategy have been accused of failing to acknowledge the multiplicity of forms and functions of qualitative research (Silverman 2000). According to Phillimore and Goodson (2004) qualitative research is as much a way of conceptualizing and approaching social inquiry as it is a way of doing research. They claim that qualitative inquiry as a strategy can generate theory out of research. The emphasis should be placed on understanding the world from the perspective of its participants, studying things in their natural settings; and view social life as being the result of interaction and interpretation, interpreting phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them, humanizing problems and gaining an 'emic' or insider's perspective. Qualitative research involves *“the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials—case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional and visual*

*texts—that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives”* (Phillimore and Goodson 2004).

#### **4.2.2. Choosing a paradigm**

Before committing to particular research methods, Guba and Lincoln (1994) advice that consideration is given to the more basic question of paradigm. “Questions of method are secondary to questions of paradigm, which we define as the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). In Guba (1990) *“paradigms...can be characterized by the way their proponents respond to three basic questions, which can be characterized as the ontological, the epistemological, and the methodological questions”*. These questions are:

Ontological: What is the nature of the ‘knowable’? Or, what is the nature of ‘reality’?

Epistemological: What is the nature of the relationship between the knower (the inquirer) and the known (or knowable)?

Methodological: How should the inquirer go about finding out knowledge?

According to Sarantakos (1998, p. 32) methodology “is a model, which entails theoretical principles as well as a framework that provides guidelines about how research is done in the context of a particular paradigm”. Methods are “the tools or instruments employed by researchers to gather empirical evidence or to analyze data” (Sarantakos 1998, p. 32).

Thus, a paradigm is the overlying view of the way the world works; methodology is the complementary set of guidelines for conducting research within the overlying paradigmatic view of the world; and the methods are the specific tools of data collection and analysis a researcher will use to gather information on the world and thereby subsequently build ‘theory’ or ‘knowledge’ about that world (Jennings, 2001, p.34).

In research construction, methodology is dependent upon ontology, which in turn is dependent upon epistemology. Any given paradigm represents the most informed and sophisticated view that its proponents have been able to devise given the way they have chosen to respond to the three defining questions. Epistemologically, Guba and Lincoln (1994) note that *“except for positivism, the paradigms discussed are all still in formative stages; no final agreements have been reached even among their proponents about their definitions, meanings, or implications.”*

Below I am describing the constructivist paradigm. I will demonstrate its ontological, epistemological assumptions.

#### **4.2.3. The Constructivist Paradigm**

Constructivism is said to have evolved as a reaction to (post) positivism and it is not only similar but also derived from postmodernism (Hemmingway, 1999, Hetherington, 2003, cited in Ayikoru, 2009, p. 71). I will argue that constructivism belongs to the holistic-inductive-paradigms in general and in more specific the interpretivist that is based on the work of Max Weber and his term ‘verstehen’ or empathetic understanding. *“Empathic or appreciative accuracy is attained when, through sympathetic participation, we can adequately grasp the emotional context in which the action took place”* (Weber 1978, p.5 as cited in Jennings 2001, p. 38). Constructivism is underpinned by a relativist ontological worldview. In the words of Guba and Lincoln (1998 cited in Ayikoru 2009, p. 71)

reality exists 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 depend on their content on the individual person or groups holding the constructions”*. Furthermore these constructions that result from the multiple realities apprehended by individuals do not conform to absolute truth (Hetherington, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1998; Wang 1999, cited in Ayikoru 2009, p. 71). *“Constructions are not more or less ‘true,’ in any absolute sense, but simply more or less informed and/or sophisticated. Constructions are alterable, as are their associated ‘realities’”* (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). There is no objective knowledge and truth but perspectival, it is created but not discovered by the mind (Schwandt, 1998). In this sense, constructivism means that humans do not discover knowledge so much as construct it. We invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience and we continually test and modify these constructions according to new experience. Constructivist epistemology is transactional and subjectivist. *“The investigator and the object of investigation are assumed to be interactively linked so that the ‘findings’ are literally created as the investigation proceeds”* (Guba and Lincoln 1994). The inquirer cannot be separated unproblematically from the object of inquiry in the process of knowledge creation (Guba and Lincoln, 1989 cited in Ayikoru 2009, p. 72).

### 4.3. The Case Study Approach

A case study according to Yin (1994) is *“an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”*. Stake (1995, p. xi) defines a case study as *“the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances”*. A case study is useful in serving as an *“intensive detailed description and analysis of a single project, program, or instructional material in the context of its environment”* (Frechtling and Sharp, 1997). The case study approach accommodates the character of this research endeavor best. As Yin notes *“the major rationale for using this method [i.e., a case study] is when your investigation must cover both a particular phenomenon and the context within which the phenomenon is occurring”*.

For the purpose of this research I selected a single case study. That means only one case is studied holistically, and I chose it for its uniqueness. I could argue that Sadhana Forest is a quite extreme case in the sense that what it stands for, what its intent and guiding principles are, give rise to an experience that quite distinct not only from the ‘western mainstream’ but also a usual tourist experience in a less economically developed country. At the same time it combines several functions and characteristics that are of interest of this study such as it is an afforestation project inviting volunteers, it is a kind of community, like an ecovillage or intentional community and it is also on the WOOFing<sup>6</sup> list. It is predominantly an exploratory case study that explores a particular tourism phenomenon to discover uniqueness of characteristics, since no pre-existing data exists. There are many studies on nature based volunteer tourism as well as on community based, but none on the kind of volunteer experience that this particular case, namely Sadhana Forest offers. What is unique about the volunteer experience in Sadhana forest is that it offers the experience of living (even for as

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<sup>6</sup> WWOOF is a worldwide network of organisations, which link volunteers with organic farmers, and help people share more sustainable ways of living.

short as two weeks) in an intentional community or ecovillage in combination with volunteering elements that nature and community based volunteer projects offer. Moreover looking at Sadhana Forest as a community of practice it provides the opportunity to learn and expand our knowledge of communities of practice and their effect on travellers.

Furthermore this case is intrinsic as it holds a particular interest for me the researcher as I will further explain in my reflexivity section. Last but not least this case has also instrumental elements; it is studied in order to achieve secondary ends, that is *“to provide insight into an issue or refinement of theory”* (Stake 1994). That is I am not solely interested in the experience of volunteers in Sadhana Forest but also on the impact this experience has on them. More in specific I am interested in the learning that volunteer travellers undergo while living and volunteering in Sadhana Forest. Basically Sadhana Forest, the case, is seen as a catalyst that the travellers go through and the actual intent of the study is the transformative potentials of the catalyst.

One of what some see as a pitfall of the case study method is what Stake (1995) calls *“progressive focusing”*. The case study focus is emergent, as the study progresses, rather than the research focus being clearly stated at the outset. Also in exploratory case studies, fieldwork, and data collection may be undertaken prior to definition of the research questions. However, the framework of the study must be created ahead of time. Personally I went to the field without a concrete research question, or questions that I would ask the interviewees (see below). I spend first a week letting myself immerse in the setting and situation and then I formulated the questions. The only danger is that the researcher might get too much immersed in the specific case and loses the overall focus to generate knowledge. However this tactic I believe helps enormously in trust building and offers a deep insider's perspective. The quintessential characteristic of case studies is that they strive towards a holistic understanding of cultural systems of action (Feagin, Orum, and Sjoberg, 1990, in Tellis, 1997). Cultural systems of action refer to sets of interrelated activities engaged in by the actors in a social situation (Tellis, 1997). Case studies must always have boundaries (Stake, 1995). Selection must be done so as to maximize what can be learned, in the period of time available for the study (Stake, 1995).

A frequent criticism of the case study method is that its dependence on a single case renders it incapable of providing a basis for scientific generalization. But the purpose as Yin (1994) notes *“is to generalize to theoretical propositions, not to population as in statistical research”*.

It has also been argued that case studies tend to reflect the bias of the researcher who is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Beeton, 2005). However Yin (1994) maintains that this issue is not restricted only to this research method. One way to overcome part of this criticism is 'triangulation' (see below). On the other hand Stake (1995) sees researchers bias as something positive, emphasizing that the case study is personal, situational and intricate. By making the reader aware of the personal experience of gathering data and the previous experience of those involved in the work provides access to knowledge that the reader may not otherwise obtain (Stake, 1995).

According to Beeton (2005) one of the strengths of the case study approach *“lies in its holistic-inductive nature and grounding in actuality with an emic (insider's) perspective, which is pertinent to applied disciplines such as tourism”*. The insider's view provides the best lens to understanding the phenomenon being studies, because the 'emic perspective' allows for the identification of multiple realities (Fetterman, 1989, p. 31, cited in Jennings, 2001, p.128).

## 4.4. Methods of Data Collection

### 4.4.1. Participant Observation

In Patton's words (1990, p.67 as cited in Jennings p.169) participant observation involves "*intensive fieldwork in which the investigator is immersed in the culture under study*". In the literature participant observation has been described in various ways. In respect to the role the researcher takes, Junker (1960 cited in Jennings, 2001, p. 169) identifies four roles: the 'complete observer', the 'observer as participant', the 'participant as observer' and the 'complete participant'. Delamont (2004) points to the importance "*to participate enough to be able to write feelingly about the nature of the work: its pains and pleasures, smells and sounds, physical and mental stresses*". Personally during my fieldwork I was a full participant, taking part in all activities just like any other volunteer at the project. However in the back of my mind was always my research project. This approach actually fits very much with my general attitude towards life; I feel that I throw myself in the experiences of life with the eyes of an anthropologist. Delamont (2004) argues that the researcher cannot actually spend the whole time taking actively part, "*because that would prevent both studying other members of the social world and, perhaps more vitally, time spent writing the field notes, thinking about the fieldwork, writing down those thoughts, and systematically testing the initial insights in the setting*". My experience was that it is difficult, tiring and at times even stressful. However I tried my best to do both as good as possible.

Since I adopted the role of a complete participant I was in principle covert rather than partially or completely overt. Many of the fellow volunteers did not know that I was conducting a research, unless I had told them. But even for those who knew that besides being a volunteer just like them, I was doing a research, I was not treated suspiciously. In effect I did not follow Runcie's (1976, in Jennings, p. 170) four stages for participant observation that is entering-establishing relationship-being granted membership-departing. Instead I entered like a volunteer, just like everybody else. In my case that was very easy because a lot of new people were arriving every day. So I was perceived first as the volunteer Elisabeth and second and only by some as a researcher, but even then this second function was not the predominant overshadowing my volunteer role. In that way I managed to get a deep emic approach. The only person that I informed prior to the start of the fieldwork was Aviram, one of the initiators of the project, which one could see as a gatekeeper. He welcomed me to do this study, without putting me any restrictions. Gold (1969, in Bowen 2002) outlines two potential problems that a covert participant observer might face. These are one may become too self-conscious that he or she fails to perform convincingly in the pretended role or one goes too native and fails in his observer role. For me being a participant-volunteer felt completely natural so I did not feel I had to pretend. The second problem was overcome through a deliberate strategy of "*immersion and resurfacing*" (Dalton 1959, p. 283, in Bowen 2002). At that point I would like to add, that I tend to have the eyes of a research in general in my life, letting myself immerse in a situation but at the same time observe it, like a sort of meditation where I am present but at the same time I am watching my mind, and how it reacts or tends to react to a situation.

### 4.4.2. Interviews

Interviews provide a way of generating empirical data about the social world (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). They are "*merely one of the many ways in which two people talk to one another*" (Benney and Hughes 1970, p. 191, in Jennings, 2001, p. 162). So interviews are a form of conversation (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995) with a purpose (Dexter, 1970, p149 cited in Jennings, 2001, p. 162). Traditionally

interview conversations have been seen as a pipeline for transmitting knowledge. But Holstein and Gubrium (1995) note that *"meaning is socially constituted"* and *"all knowledge is created from the actions undertaken to obtain it"*. According to them an interview *"is not merely a neutral conduit or source of distortion, but a site of, and occasion for, producing reportable knowledge itself"*. Interviewers are deeply and unavoidably implicated in creating meanings that ostensibly reside within respondents. So both parties to the interview are necessarily and ineluctably active. Meaning is not merely elicited by apt questioning, nor simply transported through respondent replies; it is actively and communicatively assembled in the interview encounter. In their view (and mine as well) respondents are not so much repositories of knowledge as they are constructors of knowledge in collaboration with the interviewer. And the data produced from an interview are unavoidably collaborative (Alasuutari, 1995; Holstein and Staples, 1992, cited in Holstein and Gubrium, 1995).

Oakley (1981, in Jennings, 2001, p. 162) also considers interviews an exchange, as to her the interviewer must engage with the respondent to establish rapport or in Holstein and Gubrium (1995) words a climate for mutual disclosure. Oakley claims that there is *"no intimacy without reciprocity"*. I felt often that during an interview I had to share my opinion/thoughts/feelings with respondents, especially when asked. I am afraid there is a very thin line between what is too much sharing and what not, and I am not sure if I sometime crossed it, but I always tried not to impose any of my ideas. Furthermore interviews maybe become *"a site for personal reflection by interviewees"* (Jennings, 2001, p.162). As Patton (1990, pp.353-4, in Jennings, 2001, pp. 162-3) notes: *"The process of being taken through a directed, reflective process affects the person being interviewed and leaves them knowing things about themselves that they didn't know – or at least were not aware of – before the interview."* As I see an interview as an interaction with both parts active, I will argue that an interview can be a site of reflection for both the interviewee and the interviewer. It happened to me several times that an interviewee made me see things from a different angle and become aware of things about myself. At the same time there were occasions that an interviewee told me that through our conversation/interview he or she came to realize things about him/herself.

There are various types of interviews, ranging from less to more structure, each with its advantages and disadvantages. For the purpose of this study I opted for open ended, semi-structured interviews. I had four questions that I asked all respondents, except for Aviram, the co-creator of the project/community. With him the interview was more unstructured, although I had a mental list of things I wanted to get to know from him. The four questions I asked were the 24 interviewees were:

1. What brought you to Sadhana Forest?

With that question I was aiming to learn about the motivations, drives and aspirations of the respondents.

2. What do you feel that you have been learning in Sadhana Forest?
3. Do you feel that this place as changed to you in any way, and how?
4. How do you think you will apply the insights and feelings from you experience in SF in your life after SF?

Also I asked questions related to the everyday life, and special occasions such as the Friday movie night, the Sunday sharing etc., so to prompt respondents to share their thoughts and feelings further.

All interviews were informal and with people that I had shared more moments than just the time of the interview. They were conducted in various places such as in the forest, under a tree, next to a little temple, a chai shop or restaurant. They were conducted in private, or relative private, meaning there were people around but not in such close proximity as to listen to the conversation. I generally strived to find quiet place, which is quite a challenge in India! Also I tried to make it as convenient as possible for the respondent in respect to the choice of time and place. I used a voice recorder with the consent of the participants and later I transcribed the interviews. Concerning the sampling I used non-probability sampling and in specific a mix of convenience and purposive sampling. At the beginning of the fieldwork I used more convenience sampling (Sarantakos, 1998) that is a non-systematic selection process that was based on the proximity and ease of access I had to the participants. In later stages of the fieldwork I chose for more purposive sampling (Jennings, 2001, p. 139). That means I used my knowledge to determine who is more appropriate for inclusion in the study based on the potential *"knowledge base or closeness of fit to criteria associated with the study's focus"* of the respondent (Jennings, 2001, p. 139). I tried to interview equal numbers of male and female. Furthermore I tried to have interviews with people from different nationalities, at least these nationalities that were mostly represented. One comment I have to make here is that I didn't have any interview with people from Japan, or Korea, even though there was a number of volunteers from these countries in Sadhana Forest. The language barrier (most of them did not speak very good English) but also cultural differences made it difficult to get an interview with one of them. Altogether I interviewed 25 people, that is Aviram one of the founders of Sadhana Forest and 24 volunteers, aged from 17 to 48, but with most respondent aged between 20 and 30. From the volunteers I interviewed 10 were female and 14 male. Their nationalities were two Israeli, two Swedish, one Austrian, one Belgium, three from the USA, two Germans, one Italian, one Portuguese, seven from the UK, one French, one Canadian, one Finnish and one Indian. Out of the 24 respondent two of them were 'long-termers', that means they had decided to stay in Sadhana Forest for a period of 3 years. The rest of the volunteers had spent an average of one month in Sadhana.

#### **4.4.3. Post experience reflection**

After about 9 months from the time that the participants and I had been in Sadhana Forest, I asked participants to answer one question per email. Respondent were both volunteers that I had interviewed and others that I had not interviewed while in Sadhana Forest, but all were in Sadhana Forest at the same period as me. The reflective question I asked volunteers to reply per email to me was:

Reflecting on your experience in Sadhana Forest how do you feel this experience has impacted and changed you to the person you are now in respect to:

- values
- aspirations
- actions
- lifestyle?

I got ten responses, out of which eight were from women and two from men. Their nationalities are one English, one Finnish, two from the United States, two Indians, one Israeli, one Portuguese, one Argentinian and one Belgian.



## 4.5. Triangulation

Webb et al. (1966 cited in Oppermann 2000) and Jick (1979, in Decrop 1999) were among the first to introduce the term triangulation into the social sciences as mixing qualitative and quantitative methods. *“Social scientists have borrowed the term triangulation...to help describe how the use of multiple approaches to a research question can enable the researcher to ‘zero in’ on the answers or information sought”* (Singleton et al., 1993, p. 391, in Oppermann 2000). Later others (cf. Denzin, 1978, Rossman and Wilson, 1985) saw triangulation as a way to ground the acceptance of qualitative approaches (Decrop 1999). Denzin (1978 cited in Decrop 1999) identifies four different ‘triangulation’ approaches, namely methodological triangulation, data triangulation, investigator triangulation and theoretical triangulation. Methodological triangulation refers to using more than one research method in measuring the same object of interest, as in my case, using participant observation, semi-structured interviews and a reflective post-experience open ended question sent per email. Data triangulation refers to using the same approach for different sets of data. Investigator triangulation refers to making use of different investigators with a different background. And theoretical triangulation involves using multiple perspectives to interpret a single set of data.

The primary reason of triangulation is that data or investigator bias can be introduced by using only one research method. As Blaikie (1991, p. 115 cited in Oppermann 2000) observed *“the common theme in discussions of triangulation has been the desire to over-come problems of bias and validity. It has been argued that the deficiencies of any one method can be overcome by combining methods and thus capitalizing on their individual strengths”*.

Fielding and Fielding (1986, p. 33 cited in Oppermann 2000) suggested that *“theoretical triangulation does not necessarily reduce bias, nor does methodological triangulation necessarily increase validity”*. From a hermeneutic point of view investigator bias is impossible to eliminate. Also as Decrop (1999) notes issues of trustworthiness and triangulation are only relevant to researchers operating in the second and part of the third of Denzin’s moments of qualitative research, that is in post-positivism, interpretivism and constructionism. Therefore I use triangulation as a way to enrich my data, to add breadth and depth to my analysis but not for the purpose of pursuing ‘objective’ truth (Fielding and Fielding, 1986, p. 33 cited in Oppermann 2000).

## 4.6. Data Analyses

The process of analysis should not be seen as a distinct stage of research; rather, it is a reflexive activity that should inform data collection, writing, further data collection, and so forth. Analysis is not, then, the last phase of the research process but should be seen as a part of the research design and of the data collection (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). The research process is a cyclical one.

For some authors, analysis refers primarily to the tasks of coding, indexing, sorting, retrieving, or otherwise manipulating data. From such a perspective, the task of analysis can be conceived primarily in terms of data handling. Data analysis at this level is relatively independent of speculation and interpretation. For others analysis refers primarily to the imaginative work of interpretation rather than the more procedural, categorizing task area relegated to the preliminary work of ordering and sorting the data (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). While some emphasize the systematic display and representation with canons of rigor that reflect those of more standardized and formal qualitative methods; others, in contrast, rely on the interpretation of data through the imaginative

reconstruction of social worlds and often emphasize the unique rather than regularities of incidence or pattern (Coffey and Atkinson 1996).

Analysis is a contested word among qualitative researchers. According to Tesch (1990) there are some common features in all types of qualitative data analysis. These are: Analysis is a cyclical process and a reflexive activity; the analytic process should be comprehensive and systematic but not rigid; data are segmented and divided into meaningful units, but connection to the whole is maintained; and data are organized according to a system derived from the data themselves. Analysis is, on the whole, an inductive, data-led activity. Tesch (1990) maintains that this does not mean that analysis is a structureless process. It requires methodological knowledge and intellectual competence.

#### **4.6.1. Hermeneutic data analysis**

Hermeneutic data analysis revolves around the development of Tesch's (1990) organizing system. The purpose of an organizing system is to identify predominant themes through which narrative accounts (interviews) can be meaningfully organized, interpreted, and presented (Patterson and Williams 2002). The process of developing the organizing system is the 'analysis' and the final organizing system is the product of the analysis (Patterson and Williams 2002). According to Patterson and Williams (2002) a successful organizing system is what makes an analysis "holistic" because it shows the inter-relationships among themes while retaining a rich characterization of individual themes, something that for example content analysis fails to do.

Patterson and Williams (2002) outline the following steps to be followed in order to develop an organizing system. These are the steps I followed in my data analysis:

1. Interviews should be recorded and then transcribed for the detailed 'dialog' with the data dictated by the 'hermeneutic circle'.
2. Develop an indexing (numbering) system used to reference the location of specific units of text. A sentence is a highly useful unit as a basis for indexing. Each unit is numbered sequentially. The purpose of indexing is for locating and retrieving the units of text.
3. The interview should be read entirely one or more times so to get an initial understanding of its content prior to begin with coding.
4. Start identifying and marking meaning units. Meaning units are segments of the interview that are comprehensible on their own. This doesn't mean that they can be fully understood independent of the context in which they are embedded.
5. Develop thematic labels under which the individual meaning units can be grouped. Note here that the meaning units are actual statements from the interview, while the thematic labels represent the researcher's analysis concerning what the meaning unit reveals, so they are interpretive.
6. Try to see, understand and explain the interrelationship among themes.
7. Write a discussion of the interpretation that incorporates the empirical evidence that serves as the warrant or justification for the interpretation. It shouldn't be just a summary of what a respondent said, instead it should be interpretive.
8. Understanding of the individual, how she or he experiences and constructs the world is at the idiographic level analysis. As the researcher starts to build an understanding of several

themes that are relevant across a group of individuals or even the entire sample, identifying and interpreting these themes represents a nomothetic (across individuals) analysis. The organizing system for a nomothetic analysis may be an extension of the idiographic level organizing system, so that it captures the range of individual perspectives or it may be entirely different—an analysis of the phenomenon rather than individuals.

## 4.7. Researcher's positionality

Tribe (2005) argues that it is important for a researcher to be reflective on one's own positionality as one's experiences and worldviews have an impact on one's study. Ateljevic et al. (2005) claim that tourism scholars need to be more transparent about their positioning and reveal the geo-body-political location of the subject that speaks. Morrow (2007) notes that it is common for qualitative researchers to make public their "*social location*", to explicitly state their assumptions, biases, and motivations. This can help the researcher to gain more credibility and transparency. As I also believe that the lens of the researcher is important to be public to the reader in the following section I will try to reveal my positionality, to show where I am coming from, what has shaped me, and what are my motivations and biases.

This study evolved out of a genuine interest of mine that is in how humans can live in greater harmony with themselves, each other, and all of other beings on our planet earth. Having been raised by parents of different nationalities (Greek father, German mother) and the subsequent differences cultural background, from a very young age I have been questioning the so called 'social norms' and trying to find the ones that fit me personally. I have been sort of stepping out of my culture; having had inputs from both northern and southern European mentalities. Nevertheless, I have to admit that both belong to what one could call western culture.

Due to my upbringing and other reasons that I would maybe describe as 'karmic', I have been drawn to what one could name 'alternative ways of living'. When I was of school age, living in a small town in the Greek countryside, where everybody was more or less the same, I felt that I didn't fit in. But the fact that I knew from this young age that not the whole of the world is same, gave me the strength and the courage to pursue my 'uniqueness'.

Later when I moved to Athens to study economics I was introduced new lifestyles. However, even though I completed my degree in Economics, I felt that the world of business people and economists is not one that suited me. The university I attended was trying to indoctrinate us in liberal, free market principles, competition being a panacea. For some reason I was not very convinced, although I did not particularly question these assumptions at that time. This happened only in a later stage when I pursued a Masters' degree in the Netherlands where among others I did a minor in Development Studies where we examined various economic and political models.

During my time as a student Athens I discovered my love for travel. I travelled extensively within Greece, mostly to nature spots, a highlight being free camping in islands during the hot summer months. These experiences, sleeping under the stars with the sound of the waves as lulling background music, introduced me to a simple living, with deep connection to nature that made me re-evaluate luxury. It was also there that I found a community in the fellow free campers that I resonated with.

My desire to travel and discover new places took me to an exchange semester as an Erasmus student in Austria. It was there that I was for the first time introduced in social sciences for the first time and I was intrigued! Also living in a multicultural campus with students from all over the world further deepened my interest in culture and cross cultural issues. On my return to Athens I wanted to keep this multiculturalism alive, so I got involved in the couchsurfing community, a community of travelers and hosts that invites travelers into their houses, to host them, and to organize events for the community to come together. That gave me ample opportunities to become acquainted with an international backpacking community, and of course encouraged my own desire for travel.

It was during my stay in Netherlands, where I went to do an MSc in Leisure, Tourism and Environment at the University of Wageningen that I found for the first time a community that I resonated with that was also connected to a physical place. That was Droevendaal, a student housing area that consists of 30 houses with gardens and chickens, cats and dogs, and many students from all over the world. There is a common room that is used for people to give workshops (such as yoga, capoeira, acrobatics), to screen movies, or to organize other kinds of happenings. The community organizes many collective events, such as the Sunday Droef café, and there is even a festival held once a year. It is a very open, but also fluid community, as people come and go. However it tends to have a character that is guided by social and environmental awareness. It was in this place that for the first time I felt that I could be whoever I wanted to be and be accepted for that. It was also there that I was introduced to concepts such as vegetarianism and veganism, 'degrowth' etc. This in combination with theoretical inputs offered by the university such as feminism, social justice had an enormous effect in my lifestyle choices. This confirmed what I had always maybe unconsciously had been seeking for, a sense of community, in which I could be comfortable but would also challenge me as to learn and grow.

Tourism has always been an intrinsic part of my life. I have literally grown up on a campsite, as that is our little family business in Greece, a country that has been heavily impacted by tourism. Travel was in fact what brought me into being; it was on her travel to Greece that my mum met my dad. Travel to me has been very important. I regard it as something much more than an escape, it can be a vehicle to knowledge of the world, its people, and oneself- through experiencing different environments, habits, ways of thinking and being; and personal change.

India has attracted me ever since I was a child, maybe from an intuitive attraction to Eastern philosophies that are much more all-encompassing as opposed to the dualistic view of the world of Judaic-Christianity and western philosophy. Auroville, an ecovillage in South India seemed to me like the perfect setting where I could endeavor in my personal interests and at the same time complete the obligation of my university studies to write a master thesis. So I went to Auroville in February 2010. My initial idea when going there was to study visitors in an ecovillage, always having in the back of my mind learning and personal change. I gave myself a couple of weeks' time to explore the place. Soon I realized that Auroville is a place of enormous diversity, and its visitors are too varied to be the subject of study for a master thesis. Therefore I decided to narrow down my research subject and I picked one of the many communities that exist within Auroville. That was Sadhana Forest, one of the most vibrant ones. I chose Sadhana Forest merely for its radical nature and for the reason that the majority of the visitors were my age and social group, so I could much easier identify with the people and gain an emic approach. By radical I mean the community is driven by strong principles and, guided by rules that pursue a way of living that is quite distinctive compared to the western mainstream.

## 5. Results and Discussion

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### 5.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide an analysis of the experience of volunteer travellers in Sadhana Forest. In particular it seeks to answer the research questions. Therefore in the first section of this chapter I will try to exhibit the motivations and expectations of the volunteer travellers. In the second section I look into learning. The key themes of learning which arose out of the interviews will be quoted, described and analyzed. Subsequently I demonstrate the impact the experience of volunteering in Sadhana Forest had on the travellers according to what they said and wrote to me. Then I try to lifting my findings to a higher level of theorisation related to the change of values, behaviour and actions. I look at Sadhana Forest as a catalyst, a space and a phenomenon that I try taking from the micro level of the volunteers' accounts to position in a macro level and discuss its significance in the bigger picture.

### 5.2 Motivations and Expectations

In the light of my argument that young people are looking for more meaningful lives and forms of living that are more sustainable, in this section I will enquire into the motivations and expectations of volunteer travelers going to Sadhana Forest. In respect to motivations, the majority of interviewees mentioned learning as being among their reasons for coming to Sadhana Forest. Jeremy was *"interested in conservation and ecology and reforestation, water conservation in particular... I decided to take 6 months off from work and find myself a project somewhere in the world, preferably India where I could learn something about ecology, something about water conservation in particularly, solar power, alternative power is also interesting."*

In particular conservation and forestry draw several volunteers, like Fiona who *"was looking for a conservation project"*. Some of the volunteers seem to be at a crossroads in their lives, in a gap year either before or after their studies. Being concerned about their futures they look for answers in respect to what direction they should take for the years ahead. Krischan explains:

*"There was also a concern about what will I study, maybe it is interesting for me to work in a forest, work FOR nature that could be interesting. I made my A levels in forestry, you have half year school half practicals, and I was doing forestry, but that was basically about how you make as much money as possible as fast as possible. That was not what I wanted. So I wanted to know what a reforestation project is like."*

Similarly, Sebastian recounts: *"I was unemployed and I was looking into going to a conservation environment degree...i ran out of time...and decided to go and get some practical experience somewhere in the world....Sadhana came up by a friend, and I always wanted to go to India, religion fascinates me"*. Volunteering to him is a good way *"to stay in an area for longer periods ...you spend a good amount of time affordably...but also if you work voluntarily you can learn, gaining good experience for the future..."* he confirms what previous research in volunteer tourism has shown, that volunteer travellers are among others motivated by the potential of developing skills and gathering experience, and enhance their curriculum vitae.

Kaya was also interesting in learning. *"I came here with the aim to learn something about gardening and permaculture and Marco (my boyfriend) is more interested in building, ecological building, water*

*conservation. And in all the other project you do either gardening or other stuff and we thought that in Sadhana it is a good combination of both and that we both could find something."*

Others seemed to be more interested in the community life such as Matthew:

*"What brought me to Sadhana? I guess the desire to live in a community, or to just try it out, I have always been intrigued by communes, by communal living and I kind of felt that my trip to India was a good chance to explore that a bit..."*

Steve came randomly to Sadhana and spent a day there as a guest decided to stay as a volunteer because:

*"I never stayed in a community like that and I really liked the idea...of living basically without any luxury so to speak. The communal living, living in dormitories and eating food that was pretty basic and simple and the reforestation and raising the water table, I thought that was really interesting. So I wanted to see if the project was ...how it was working and if it was really beneficial for the Indians living around, the villages."*

Mia came to Sadhana because she wants to start up her own eco community and is looking for information; to learn from the experience of others how to do it herself.

*"I want to have an eco-community one day myself, I have this dream with my friends, we started planning it last year and yeah we all need to find more information, so I was going to India and I was sure I'm gonna do farming there, I'm sure I'm gonna learn something about it, so it was also for that reason".*

Ma'at also came because he wanted to learn about permaculture and community. He also aspires to create his own community one day. Matt from the U.K., on the other hand, came because he wanted to get out of a situation he considered unhealthy and was making him unhappy. As he explains *"The reason I came was basically for the experience but at the time when I decided to come I was unhappy, I was unhealthy physically and mentally. So, I just wanted to get out of England get away from everything for a while...I don't know really, maybe because I was in drugs and stuff, I was kind of having bad relationships because of the state I got into, because I was not able to communicate with my best friends and stuff like that."*

For some participants volunteering itself was their main motivation to come to Sadhana Forest. Lia came *"to India to have an experience in volunteering"*. Roy from Israel similarly says: *"I wanted to check it out... to come to volunteer, because this is my first time to volunteer."* Other reasons the interviewees mentioned were *"to meet people"* and see how the project works. Theresa from Austria was attracted by: *"the idea of being together with nice people and sharing the spirituality, sharing the love, working outside in the forest, be in nature all the time, learn a lot of things."*

In short, participants of this study seem to be driven by similar motivations to the ones that literature on volunteer tourists has indicated. Solely the motivation to 'experience community life' was one that had not been identified in previous research. This I argue is due to the fact that there has not been any research on volunteer travel in the setting of an intentional community before. Related to this is also the motivation of some participants to learn from the case of Sadhana Forest because they want to start up similar projects themselves in the future. As learning has been identified to be a major motivation for the majority of participants, in the following section I will explore the processes of learning and transformation that were reported by the participants of this study. I suggest that the

motivation to learn positively influences the occurrence of learning; it facilitates and enforces the processes of learning.

## **5.3 Process of Learning and Transformation in Sadhana Forest**

### **5.3.1 Introduction**

In this section I will look at Sadhana Forest as a community of practice and a ground for transformative learning. Sadhana Forest offers a variety of opportunities for learning, these being through the work that volunteers engage in, the workshops offered by volunteers and sometimes by experts coming in just for a visit in order to share their knowledge, by the eco-film where mostly documentaries are being screened, by the interaction of people, and by just being, living and volunteering in the community. First, I will analyze what kinds of learning opportunities are present in Sadhana Forest. Second, I will exhibit what interviewees reported as learning outcomes from their experience. Then, I will try to identify the extent to which this learning was transformative, and what share of the overall experience contributed to a change. Knox (1977) observes that there are triggering events that cause adults to change existing roles or engage in new ones, and that these events motivate a person to change, adopt a new lifestyle, seek additional training or education and accommodate new life roles. Sadhana seems to offer a multitude of such trigger.

### **5.3.2 Transformative Learning in Sadhana Forest**

Hudson (1999) notes that learning can take two forms: developmental and transformative. Developmental learning focuses on human effectiveness in personal life and career. Transformative learning, however, aims at evoking a new consciousness and self-understanding, and promotes the human experience by thinking, self-expression and actions (Hudson, 1999). From the accounts of the interviewees it becomes evident that Sadhana Forest provides opportunities for both forms of learning. However the focus of the study is on transformative learning.

What we are concerned with is perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1985) where the ultimate goal of transformative learning is to empower individuals to change their frames of reference or worldviews (Moore, 2005). Processes of critical reflection (Moore, 2005; Cranton, 1994) of "*both habits of mind and points of view*" (Moore, 2005) are fundamental to such learning, which invokes processes of re/constructing knowledge based on life experiences, and arriving at new ways of thinking and being (Cranton, 1994). Such education is founded on critical pedagogy, which critiques the idea that knowledge is value-free and works to transform society to be more democratic and less oppressive (Share, 2003).

Mezirow (1991) considers ten elements/events to be present in perspective transformation. He suggests that following a triggering event, or disorienting dilemma, individuals experience a sequence of events, which can occur in any order. These events lead to a transformation in perspective that is more integrative of life experience and is more discriminating, inclusive, and permeable than the replaced meaning perspective. The events following a disorienting dilemma are self-examination; critical assessment of assumptions; recognizing that discontent and transformative experiences are shared; exploring options for new roles, relationships, and actions; planning a course of action; acquiring knowledge and skills; provisionally trying new roles; renegotiating relationships

and building new ones; and reintegrating the new perspective into one's life. Other features include the importance of critical reflection on assumptions, democratic dialogue, and reflective emancipatory action, or praxis.

Sadhana Forest, in my opinion, can act as a form of this disorienting dilemma. Travelers that decide to come to volunteer and live in the community for several weeks, leave their everyday life routine behind and venture into a different way of living. Living in a simple way, in nature, with many people in very close proximity, with hardly any privacy, with a lot of physical contact among each other (morning circles, hugging, etc.), eating vegan food, practicing non-violence and non-competition to the point that competitive games are not allowed; by spending an intensive time there I witnessed how many of these practices, being quite different to the western norm, produced a sort of disorienting dilemma. Next, I will argue, Sadhana provokes self-examination. Adeline supports this argument by saying:

*"I was reading this girl [’s blog] and she was saying it very well, she said I never thought so much about sustainable development, about community, about being here because they go to such kind of extreme, being vegan, no alcohol, no drugs. That is when you are confronted to such an extreme thing that you think the most. And I like that way of putting it because I think it’s true. I’m not vegan not even vegetarian, yeah I try to be environmentally friendly, to be careful, but not too much, you know it’s not that important in my life, but being here and seeing, makes you think about...and because they really apply what they believe in, in a kind of extreme way of course makes you react in a good or bad way, because some people are like oh too many rules, it’s too much, you don’t need all that... maybe for them, but then it makes you think, that’s the good thing, Sadhana makes you think. So I love that."*

That is also one of Aviram’s purposes, to show people that there are alternatives to many lifestyle practices that volunteers are used to and often take for granted. This exposure to alternatives provokes a serious reflection in many people, which in turn leads them to a re-assessment of their assumptions. In addition, the social aspect of Sadhana, the fact the volunteers are encouraged to interact with each other, fosters the exchange of experiences. Many people are either going through similar processes or have been through them in the past, and can then share these with other people facing similar struggles. In that sense there are ample opportunities to recognize that discontent and transformative experiences are shared. Furthermore, through interaction volunteers have the chance to acquire new knowledge and skills. This aspect is also one of the major focuses of this study. Below I will provide an extended account of what interviewees revealed that they have learned. Moreover the supportive and caring environment of Sadhana Forest allows individuals to explore options for new roles, relationships, and actions, to provisionally try them out and to plan actions for the future. The final stage in transformative learning, the reintegration of the new perspectives into one’s life, can be seen to manifest itself mainly after volunteers have left Sadhana Forest. This poses a challenge for this study as the majority of data derive from the time that participants were still in Sadhana Forest. However the post-experience reflections emailed by some volunteers provided some information on how they integrated the new perspectives acquired in Sadhana Forest in their lives back home.

One further characteristic of the learning that occurs in Sadhana Forest is that it aims at head (cognitive), hands (psychomotor) and heart (affective). Sipos et.al (2008) maintains that unifying the head-hands-heart learning ideally enables targeting and transformation of the higher order



*“behavioral domain”* (Hauenstein, 1998) which is the ultimate goal of transformative learning. I argue that Sadhana Forest not only offers a learning experience that touches the domains of mind, body and spirit but also restores the connection between them. I suggest that it is a holistic learning experience that one is proffered in Sadhana Forest.

### **5.3.2 What do volunteers say in respect to learning?**

This section consists of a descriptive and thematic presentation of the processes of learning and transformation that occur in Sadhana Forest. It is a result of the analysis of my own experience while engaging in participant observation, interviews with volunteers and post-experience reflections that participants emailed to me. Key themes in the area of learning and transformation have been identified. These include practical aspects of learning related with the work volunteers were undertaking in Sadhana Forest, a community devoted to afforestation and sustainable living. These aspects can be seen as the domain of Sadhana Forest as a community of practice. Then I discuss the social aspect of learning. As it has been pointed out by the literature on communities of practice the social aspect is of great significance. Then, I exhibit various areas/domains of learning that emerged as key themes from the data, such as simple living, veganism, communal living, learning about self and about other cultures. Next, I refer to the importance of reflection in the process of learning and how volunteering in Sadhana Forest triggers reflection. Moreover I show how challenges and breakthroughs are part of the transformative learning process. Last but not least, I elaborate on the overall impact the experience had on the volunteers.

#### **5.3.2.1. Practical aspects of learning**

Sadhana Forest being primarily an afforestation project, a lot of the work that the volunteers engage in is around the areas of forestry, land management and water conservation. Sebastian, one volunteer observed that it is not so important what you do but how you do it. To him what an afforestation project needs to be successful is effort, planning and caring. *“It’s not about the money but the care...you have to consider many different thing, your relationship with neighbors, so they understand a bit of what you do...the landscape, you have to understand your ecology...”*. So it becomes apparent that the social aspect of a project and not only the technical are important. It is a systems thinking approach that Sadhana Forest espouses. *“That’s interesting also because it makes you think where you put your money in, like you give money for a carbon emission offset which can go down the toilet if the attention and care is not put in it...”* Sebastian adds to highlight that the intention behind an action is of eminent importance with direct effects on its results.

Moreover, Sadhana Forest has strived to create a community where people try to live in an environmentally sound way, minimizing their ecological footprint and offering a living example of how this can be achieved. From the experience of living in this community for a few weeks the interviewees mentioned to have learned about several practices that contribute to a sustainable living mode such as: Gardening, permaculture, composting (in particular compost toilets and ‘compostee’<sup>7</sup>), alternative energy, and sustainable living in general. For instance with composting and turning waste into natural fertilizer for the soil, or using compostee to fight pests the volunteers get acquainted with the principles of permaculture in practice and how everything can be incorporated in a cycle, how waste can be turned into food and so on. All these concepts seemed to

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<sup>7</sup> Compostee is a liquid that derives out of a process of composting that is very nurturing and potent for pest natural pest control.

be particularly interesting for volunteers, especially those who were not familiar with them before. However, it seems to be different for those who were already familiar with such concepts. As Matthew informs us:

*"I come from a sort of eco-conscious community and so those concepts, you know composting toilets, sustainable living, alternative energy I have kind of being exposed to all that before. I guess I have learned a tropical application of them, like capturing rain form monsoons, but I don't feel that I have learned of how actually to do it, if done different jobs like garden , eco-dome, forest and in all I'm always holding crowbars, digging holes...I guess the concepts are there."*

Mariana feels that it is great to take a bucket shower and in that way to become more aware of the amount of water she is using hence the reason to reduce it. Yet, she admits that this is not something she will be able to apply when she gets back to her country and in the city. Thus, one thing that the experience seems to do is to raise the environmental awareness of the volunteers, particularly for those who have not been much aware of such issues. As Matt puts it:

*"I had never known how little stuff ....this place is using something to make something else...is helping to kind of save nature...the world in a smaller scale, it is easy and achievable if people put their minds in it. I have never known much about the environment and now I do and I am more interested in it and more likely to do conservation and stuff like that because now I know how important it is. If we keep using like oil the way we do now we will soon run out. I just hope that people will realize what are the effect on planet earth we have and they have to realize before it's too late, so I learned now one good thing...people are only to find the right time to change before extinction or something, only when we are put in danger we realize we have to make a change."*

Communities of practice emphasize the experiential aspect of learning. This is prevalent in Sadhana Forest. A lot of the interviewees said that they enjoyed the 'hands-on' way of learning. Furthermore they mentioned the importance of incorporating practices in their everyday life. Johanna says:

*"I guess there are a lot of things that we now do that I know but I hadn't really put in practice, like biodegradable cells and compost and not using so much...like shampoo you can use biodegradable... I think I will change that when I will be back. And about reforestation, that's also stuff that I knew a bit about it but I had never done it and now I actually know how to do it. It's nice to put in practice what you know. "*

Del points to one realization he had while in Sadhana forest. He says *"there's always a difference between knowing and understanding and I guess some things are just been given the chance to shift from knowing to understanding. The core of this shift is due to experience. There's something you can't just explain to someone that have to have it. So there are experiences that other people have had and they can try to share, but it's not the same. It's a similar concept to a picture. It's not the same thing."*

### **5.3.2.2. Learning from people and alternative approaches to learning**

As we have seen in the theoretical section, in communities of practice the social aspect of learning is essential. Mezirow (2000) also acknowledges that social interaction is important in the learning process. People in communities of practice share their experience and knowledge in free-flowing, creative ways (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Strongin (2010) referring to intentional communities notes that the boundedness and close proximity of the community allows members to learn practical skills

from one another that are either hard to access or expensive and time-consuming to learn in the outside world. This seems to be very much the case in Sadhana Forest which can be seen as both a community of practice and intentional community. As Del puts it:

*"Individuals are bringing in their skills to the community and sharing them in some form, some people are sharing Thai-massage, some people are sharing yoga, others are sharing Russian or music whatever. And so what you can learn is what's brought in."*

In particular, interviewees mention the workshops given by volunteers. For Mariana:

*"Another thing I find very interesting is the workshops, the way people share, even if they don't know much about it, I find interesting that people are willing to share their knowledge, even if it's not a big thing, but people can participate."*

Yet learning does not occur only through workshops, which is a more organized way of knowledge transfer. It happens also just by interaction. Neenel says *"I feel that I have learned a lot from other people, like I learned some house-things about papaya seeds and neem leaves that I didn't know before. I have been enjoying talking to people, many different conversations about different projects around the world, and what everybody is doing, and thoughts on different things"*. And Kaya: *"I got some new ideas. I made many contacts, I learned about some projects, about what's going on, I learned some little stuff like how to make Kombucha, hmm about shamanism I learned a little bit more, I mean some stuff that sounds really familiar to me but you still can learn so much about it."*

What is interesting is that not everybody is totally comfortable and satisfied with this way of learning. As Krischan verbalizes:

*"The workshop situation for example, I don't like it much, because....it's not the real basic thing that you learn there. Someone knows about little things, and teaches you something. But if I really want to learn something, then I don't go for a workshop there, because that is not the real base of what I want to learn."*

For some it seems it is difficult to break out from a more institutionalized and structured way of learning towards a more informal knowledge exchange. For Lia to the contrary, this exactly makes it more appealing to her:

*"I think that it is very interesting to learn it this way, I mean you don't have to go, you can go whenever you want...it's nice...its better...it's not really teaching... it's not like school you know. In the workshops, when I tried to learn Hebrew, it was really good because you are only several people and you can talk with these people and about the country and their own experience...and its really more interesting than when you have just a teacher that talks about the language only and not about the country or anything else around it."*

This informal and almost unstructured, way of learning requires more active learners, I argue. One has to actively seek out to learn something rather than just be passively offered certain information. As Adeline describes it:

*"what I learned was more when I went to someone and I said hey, like Lulu the first day I saw here, when I went to the yoga class, I thought I want to talk with her so I went to her and I said I wanna talk to you and she kind of taught me, she gave me exercises for me because I had some problems with my back, and to breath, so that was something that happened to me, but I had to go and look for it. But people are very open, so that was something that was very good for me here, to have contact"*

*with her, and she really took me aside and we had a conversation, she gave me tips, she wrote me all the things I should do, so that's really nice."*

In a similar vein Sebastian says: *"I haven't learned so much...but maybe it has to do with me...because socially I haven't engaged as much ...it's not easy..."*

Mia exclaims:

*"I realized that learning in school is not the only option, even if you look at the university level of masters...there are more ways to learn and grow, there is a lot you can do and there are people able to do it. It's interesting...I know the school system is really flawed, I come from Finland which has supposedly one of the best systems...but ...dunno the school community breaks down... more people learn...but inside they are not feeling really well.. there must be a different way of school...different forms of school like free form...but still have a certain curriculum...because unschooling completely...hmm depends too much on the parents...in community that people are coming and going...there isn't much stability....i have very mixed feelings about it."*

Most of the interviewees share her opinion. Many embrace the principles of unschooling. They see several positive sides to it, yet they still would not do unschooling with their own children. They feel that some structure, some sort of curriculum, is still needed. Also, of major importance in unschooling are the parents, they need to be mature enough to be able to give a good education to their children. So one could say that in some way the interviewees did not trust themselves enough and did not consider themselves mature enough to be able to give the education they aspired for their offspring. Maybe total unschooling is a too radical way and people cannot that easily change their mode of thinking and living.

Mahesh from India offers a different view on the learning that occurs in Sadhana Forest. He says:

*"If you attend a course your learning will be defined, you go to learn this, you do a permaculture course and you learn something specific, you learn that thing. But here the learning is...it's a more broad kind of learning, at a very high level...i would say it is experience more for me than learning. I have come out of IT and the learning is how life would be outside the city and not how could I do things, not how to grow a tree, I still haven't learned the composting or how to take care of a tree or a plant. But now I have an idea, I started from zero. Whatever I learn is a learning at a high level, I'm not learning something specific, it's very generic, it's more than a learning, it's more of how things could be."*

What Mahesh says is of interest mainly for two reasons. One is that he says that he started from zero, so anything he learns is of interest, which is maybe not the case for some like Matthew that feels he is already acquainted with many of the concepts and practices that are present in Sadhana Forest. On the other hand, Kaya feels *"there is always so much more you can learn about these same things"*. Secondly, Mahesh points to fact that a lot of the learning in Sadhana Forest is conceptual. Sadhana is more of a demonstration site, where volunteers can get acquainted with novel or less novel concepts. Volunteers have the chance to see these concepts in practice and maybe take them on in their further life. This takes us back to the quotes of Matthew, that feels he did not learn how to actually do things and Mariana that became sensitive about water usages, but does not think she will apply the same practices in her home country. Beyond this, I suggest that volunteers need to make a synthesis of these concepts and practices and in order to put them into actions and incorporate them into lifestyle changes volunteers need to re-translate them into their home country applicability. Whether they will do this, I suggest, is related to the maturity of the individual and its willingness and readiness to change.

Nick adding to the discussion of conceptual learning maintains *"it is seed...you can make choices...there is a possibility in the world to change it...I think it does give an education of what is possible"*. Ian learned that there are *"different ways to live, different methods to have a shower, wash your hands..."* Matt explains: *"I learned to live outside Western culture which was my plan before I decided to travel but then I couldn't tell unless I came out and experienced it and yeah now I know that I can cope in a completely different environment. In the west you live in luxury, not just the basic necessities, in the West you have micro waves and stuff..."* He defines luxury as *"everything that you don't need, there are basic necessities that you need for example air and water and then beyond your basic needs is luxuries. Since being out here I discovered that water from the fridges is a luxury."*

### 5.3.2.3. Simple Living

The previous quote leads us to one more concept that Sadhana Forest introduces people to, namely 'simple living'. Simple living refers to various voluntary practices to simplify one's lifestyle, such as to reduce possessions and to increase self-sufficiency. People who choose for simple living might do so for a variety of personal reasons such as spiritual, health, reduction of ecological footprint, increase in quality time and reduction of stress. Others might choose such a lifestyle for socio-political reasons such as anti-consumerism, degrowth, conservation, and sustainable development. It can also be seen as a reaction to materialism and conspicuous consumption. E.E. Schumacher (1973) in his book *Small Is Beautiful* argued against the notion that *"bigger is better"* and Duane Elgin further promoted a simple life in *Voluntary Simplicity* (1981).

Volunteers are introduced to simple living at Sadhana forest and they react to it in various ways. For Ben it was a shock, *"at first I wanted to run away, I didn't know what to do. After a few days I realized that it's not that bad and I started enjoying myself"*. For others it was not much of a problem, they missed a few things, like Mia missed electricity and using her computer to contact friends in Europe, and the majority said that they did not mind such a situation for a while but they would not want to live like this for ever. If we look into what this experience gave to the volunteers, I suggest, it made them re-evaluate assumptions. Matt says he will be a lot more appreciative of things that he had been taking for granted when he is back in England. Also, it made volunteers to consider which things are truly necessary and which are a form of excess. In other words, it has triggered them to re-evaluate the notion of luxury. Matt exclaims *"it's a luxury to be so close to so many great people"*. This echoes the observation of Brown (2005) that volunteer travellers discovered that material needs are of minimal importance while little things such as the exchange of love, care, curiosity, understanding, and appreciation are the highlights of their experience.

With a focus on the concept of voluntary simplicity rather than the simple life experienced in Sadhana forest per se, Mahesh from India gives an interesting account:

*"I feel good; I feel more people should live a simple life. One is ...needs and wants...most of the people follow the crowd I see...everybody is growing very fast, a lot of money is coming in...some people do because they want so and others do because everybody else is doing so...here (Sadhana Forest) it's basically using what they need...I haven't watched TV for three weeks and still my life is the same way. I really like this simple way of living here. A lot of people in the cities can learn a lot from here...That's one reason I wanted to be away from the city, I want to have a more simple life, not in a polluted city. People in India just do whatever others do, they want to earn a lot of money and then they don't know what to do with that money, it's a rat race. I just prefer to read books and go for long runs to keep fit, travelling...I thought if I want to do these things I don't need to be in the city, or earn a lot. It's about a balance between money and time, maybe have more time for myself...also your lifestyle...you never feel you have enough money...you have more things to do , more expenses, expensive cloths and cars..."*

He voices the desire of many Westerners to break out of the 'rat race' which is been presented as the 'norm', because everybody is doing the same. It becomes apparent that this desire to live a more calm and satisfying life, with less material possessions and more quality time is increasingly become an aspiration of citizens of the 'global south'.

#### **5.3.2.4. Connection with Nature**

Closely related to the simple living is also the connection with nature. Adeline tells us: *"I think the place here has a lot of good energy, I mean it's the place, these huts, the fact that they are made by bamboo and ropes and the fact that you take your shower in nature, very small things that helps to connect more with nature and to connect more among them, that's also important."*

For Del who has grown up in a very sparsely populated part of Canada, what he considers as nature is a little different; to him being in Sadhana is not really being in nature, he says he can still hear the highway and see light, which is not being in the wild for him. So, through his experience in Sadhana Forest and by talking to other volunteers he realized how lucky he is for what he has in Canada, as he explains:

*"There are people, the majority of the world's population, lives in cities now. Some of them are brought up in cities their whole lives and never seen stars. They don't realize that stars twinkle and you take one of them to go camping and see the stars, and they tell you I didn't know that stars twinkle, and you realize how deprived a life like that might be and so many different things like that and I realize I'm a lucky person!"*

Regardless of the fact that these two had quite opposite experiences in Sadhana Forest, for both Adeline and Del their experience acted as a confirmation of the importance of nature.

#### **5.3.2.5. Veganism**

Sadhana Forest is a vegan community and therefore introduces many volunteers to veganism, although some are already familiar with it, and a few are already vegans. Sadhana is a vegan community for three main reasons, these are health, reduce environmental impact and avoid animal suffering. Interviewees describe various reactions to this diet and way of seeing food. Steve professes:

*"I found that the vegan diet was really really testing, hard at times, because my body is used to eat meat and dairy products. Physically it was pretty intense; I got quite ill because of the diet and the shock I gave to my system. But yeah now I think I am a lot more aware of what food I am going to eat, but I am not walking away from Sadhana and be a die-hard vegan by any means. I like to spend a bit more time searching my food, maybe try to buy more organic, because it is really bad the way we eat. Illness-wise there must be a link between illness and the amount of toxins you have in your food especially if you eat meat. You get cows that are massed farmed and injected with all sorts of hormones and you are taking all this crap into your body, this is a really bad thing."*

Mia believes that *"food affects your mentality a lot, what you eat is what you are...when I changed my lifestyle, everything together, I never felt so stable in my life"*.

Matt says in respect to diet: *"Sadhana has given me the incentive to be a lot healthier, I have been a lot healthier since I'm here both physically and mentally...and happier."* Furthermore it made him realize that he can be vegetarian. He worked for a week in the kitchen in order to learn new recipes and when at home he wants to cook for his family

Adeline explains “ *I’m not going to become vegan tomorrow , I don’t think I will ever, but still....the thing is that I like to learn about that stuff, it also reinforces the idea that I know that food is important, I know, but being here in contact with lots of people who are really one step forward to change the way they feed themselves, I think I will also go a step forward and try to be more...to watch more myself, to see how I feel depending on what I eat...and the relation we have with food and all that. I know that it’s something important and it affects us a lot.*”

So, some interviewees associate a vegan diet with health. Mahesh also considers a vegetarian or vegan diet healthier but what was new for him was to relate the food he consumes with the environmental impact it has on the planet. “*Before coming to Sadhana I saw veganism or vegetarianism only from the health aspect, after coming here I also looked into the environmental effect of it that would be true also for bananas coming from somewhere far away.*” He concludes that he agrees with an ayurvedic doctor that had given a workshop in Sadhana forest saying that people should eat only local food.

For some living in a vegan community for a few weeks, provided them with new ideas and views on diet, or it reinforced already existing views. Two of the interviewees clearly demonstrated transformative learning; they both underwent a perspective transformation which was followed by the action of becoming vegan. Krischan had been vegetarian for 10 years, because he did not want to support the meat industry because of its environmental impact and for how it treats the animals, but he had never thought of the practices of the dairy industry. This was the first revelation for him. The second was the new knowledge he acquired, that milk is actually not so beneficial for the human body, “*there is this common knowledge that milk is so important for you, that was fixed because that was what people told me when I was a little child so I never thought that there was something more*”. After these two revelations that transformed his perspective he decided to incorporate his new knowledge into his daily life and become a vegan. Johanna underwent an even deeper transformation. She had never considered veganism, “*I didn’t eat that much meat, but I ate a looot of dairy products and eggs and I didn’t even think of the effect of that*”. She explains “*it’s not healthy, and not natural and of course the industry is just disgusting and yeah I just feel it’s not the way we should live, like not taking advantage of animals for our own gain, it is just not right and I feel that it makes me sad, and it makes me sad that I hadn’t considered it before, such a big thing. I want to live in a sustainable way and eating animal products is just not the way you should do if you want to be sustainable.*”

Johanna seems to move from an anthropocentric habit of mind to one that other beings are equal to humans and therefore humans do not have the right to exploit animals for their own profit. Mezirow (1996) stated, “*A transformative learning experience requires that the learner makes an informed and reflective decision to act*”. One of the more dramatic actions that an individual can take is to make a major change in her or his diet (McDonald, Cervero, & Courtenay, 1999).

#### **5.3.2.6. Community life and different ways of being and relating to each other**

Experiencing community life was one of the motivations to come to volunteer in Sadhana Forest and essentially the only different one from what volunteer travel literature reveals. Almost all the interviewees said that they learned something about different aspects of community life from their experience in Sadhana Forest, whether they had been in a community before or if it that was something totally new to them. Del sees Sadhana Forest as “*a place for people who aren’t used to live in community are coming here and might have to learn to deal with that, and the majority of people that’s what I’m saying are individuals, they are not community. You can look at those two*

*words and call them scary because when I think of them I think of extremes of both. But really I guess what Sadhana is trying to get here, is compromising these two. People learn here right away that if someone doesn't show up to help fix supper, they suffer. So they don't have supper. So they are also suffering but then people actually learn or not, I'm actually not sure, or they just put up with it."*

*Sebastian reports that he learned about "Community life...how it functions...how people work together. Some people will be like hard workers, some not so much, everybody comes together and they learn how to interact with people. People learn how to deal with different sorts of people...maybe become slightly more tolerant...maybe that's judgmental...then you learn...that they are not the way you anticipate...and it's a lot easier to spend time with these people, while in the city you might just get passed by them, or just stare at them and you don't have the chance to get to know them. Here you are lot more exposed."*

*Mahesh saw "people helping each other" and that was different from what he knew from his life in the city. "It's a good experience...I definitely learned ...experienced the giving part". Kaya learned „about sharing with people" and Johanna realized that people can be nice to each other. "Now I know that people can be nice to each other, That's actually like a big change, a bit change from Sweden in winter, people don't talk to each other, you don't smile to each other, I actually do but people think I'm crazy. So it's nice to see that there are places that people are nice and caring to each other even if they don't know each other .It gives me hope for humanity!"*

*Ben learned that "there are people in the world that want to change the world, that's amazing, it's inspiring."*

*It becomes apparent that a communal way of living encourages also alternative way of relating to fellow human. Stevie describes what he learned about people from the community life:*

*"I guess I've learned a lot about people, I've learned that a lot of people, wear masks. In particularly in the Sunday meeting when everybody from Sadhana sits down open their hearts in various shapes and forms, seeing many people being really true to themselves, ...and yeah this made me think...yeah I think everybody wears a mask to a certain extend. And Sadhana to me is a place where you can get really down to the root of yourself; you can open yourself up and be really honest with yourself. I think it has made me see myself clearer. "*

*When asked how this happened Stevie replied:*

*"I guess it's happened through the medium of waking up in the morning and you are all grouped together and you are all standing in the circle, holding the hand of the person on the right and the left to you and you are singing together and all these things I guess, originally I was really caught up in myself and I slowly got to open myself up more, thought yeah I guess the physical contact. People that you don't know which is something really foreign to me, it takes a bit more time to trust people, yeah it kind of allowed me to naturally feel a lot more open and be able to talk to people easier."*

*Many people spoke about openness; how the experience of the community life in Sadhana forest made them to open up. Fiona explains about herself: "I think it's challenging for me to be open. That was the biggest challenge...to come to a group of people who all sort of know each other and talk to each other...slowly I'm getting a bit more open...but it definitely helped me to....open up".*



Ian describes his experience: *"I was coming from Goa and I was very introvert, being inside myself...so my first reaction was...how outward everybody could be...open and sharing. So after spending some time there I realized how I could be open...as opposed to keeping everything locked up. "*

Theresa elaborated a bit more on the openness, as she realized *"that if you first open up to a person and it doesn't work it is not your problem, it's the problems of the other person and if you just stay open and try again and again, then the other person will open up and you will see that it's only fear that kept this person away from you. I learned also that the thoughts I have or the reality that I create isn't always the truth, it's old habits that are still stuck in my head, so I start thinking for other people what could they think, what could they expect what could be in their mind and that also blocks me and keeps me away from them, because in reality they are totally different but I kind of judge them."*

### **5.3.2.7. Learning about Self**

Fusell (1982, in Wearing et al, 2008, p. 69) purports that the experience of travel is interconnected with self-discovery. Similarly, Brown (2005) maintains that travel offers an opportunity to re-evaluate and discover more about the self. Indeed many interviewees report having learned something about themselves while volunteering in Sadhana Forest. Stevie says:

*"I think Sadhana is a really good place to analyze yourself and see your faults, even showing me that I'm maybe a little bit selfish and that's the way I have been brought up and everything has been really easy, so you have the Sadhana thing, the food and everything like that. It has made me a lot more aware that I am a selfish westerner who takes for granted his house and electricity and car, petrol, money to buy food from all over the world. It's kind of made more aware of the luxury in which I live."*

Lia also reports: *"I learned a lot about myself. Now I know that I am capable of many things. And I know what I really want to do! Well, I had an idea before but now I know. I will go and work for the Fair Trade and solidarity, international solidarity"*.

Fundamental to the concept of self is also the concept of 'other' and our relationship with those with whom we interact. It is often within this interaction that learning occurs (Bennetts, 2003). Ma'at a long term volunteer when talking about his self-development while in Sadhana he says: *"The positive the negative things that I encounter are all part of it. Some of this forces me to look inside, at myself and to...i just have my personal development thing through some of the negative things. Communal, or individual or personal...It is difficult at times, you get caught up by the history, your past, how things are supposed to be based on the ways you are raised... suddenly you come to Sadhana where there is all these people from all over the world, people who are so rigid, people that are so flexible and it creates this atmosphere of this crazy energy and ... no matter how difficult things are, there is always something to learn, to grow from, to develop. And I get something from everybody and then...one thing that I consistently hear among other things is that people come to Sadhana and they experience a lot of personal like how do you say...they pay a lot of karmic debt. A lot of people coming in have sometimes really bad experiences and sicknesses and mental letting go of thing. But a lot of times people leave renewed, they leave like feeling very light, very happy, leaving a lot of things they had been carrying with them. These are some of the things that I have been doing, like my past childhood, school, relationships, my personal issues relate to a number of things and in Sadhana even though I'm constantly busy, I'm also stilling with these things. And I have grown quite a lot on a personal level, even if I haven't learned as much as I thought I'd be learning on land*

*management...some of these other things, I 've learned a lot about myself in a much quicker way I would if I'd stayed in the west. So...in some ways I guess my expectations are coming back, what I'd expected to learn, after 6 month, it might be less, but a lot of the growth that I have overcome is been very rewarding"*

When asked what induced this sort of learning he replied:

*"Well depending on your belief you might take it or interpret it in different ways, but I think that because of the original ideas and original intentions of the community it has created a certain atmosphere, that isn't necessarily so much seen as experienced... I think that some of that intensity, the energy, whatever is comfortable for you to call it, I think a lot of it comes from the traditional ideals...The foundation of the community being vegan, no business, based off contribution...ehm the name itself Sadhana, spiritual work, it means doing things whether digging a hole in the forest, cutting trees, sweeping the floor whatever working on the internet, waking up for first circle even though you are tired, devoting your time for yoga, tai chi , meditation it can all be spiritual. It isn't always for everybody but it can be and that's basically what Sadhana's ideals are...and its intend doesn't just dissolve and I think this intend actually creates an atmosphere that increases people's ability to deal with karma...ehm whether these people recognize it or not...it doesn't matter it's still there."*

#### **5.3.2.8. Intercultural exchange**

Sadhana Forest induces intercultural exchange which in turn can foster global citizenship. Volunteers from different parts of the world are coming together and, as the interviewees' accounts show, they have the opportunity to interact in a much deeper way than if they would just meet in a guesthouse or another tourist meeting spots. This interaction promotes mutual understanding and appreciation and friendship (Brown, 2005). Furthermore the fact that they are working together results in different level of exchange that goes beyond the 'just having fun together' mode of interaction. This interaction brings people with common interests together and helps in the creation of a global network of alternatively oriented people. One more interesting point is that Sadhana Forest offers ample opportunities for interaction with people from different backgrounds. My observation as a traveller myself has been that, in more typical travelling situations, Europeans tend to hang out with Europeans or Americans and not so much with Japanese for example who will stick more to themselves and vice versa. Also I have experienced how difficult it is to have a genuine and deep interaction with local people in less economically developed countries like India. Sadhana Forest gave me and the other 'western' travellers the chance to meet Indian people and have a true connection with them that creates deeper mutual understanding. At the same time it has an empowering effect on Indians as well. Tanya recounts *"I felt that race/nationality was less of a hurdle in human relations than personality types"*. Pankhuri, a young lady from New Delhi narrates: *"In the beginning i had trouble getting close to people as I always feared that they would judge me from my skin color and nationality. And sometimes they did. Some loved me a lot and wanted to know me better. While others i felt kept a distance because they probably thought that i was just another inexperienced Indian. Westerners who have not been to big cities in India often end up thinking that Indians are generally not very comfortable to talk with.. One thing which i loved in Sadhana was [learning] to accept myself completely as a beautiful person"*.

It becomes apparent how this aspect of intercultural exchange is full of difficulties and complexities. Yet, at the same time it is full of possibilities for cultural exchange that can advance global peace.

According to Bud Philbrook (pers. Comm. cited in Brown, 2005), president and CEO of Global Volunteers, volunteer service engenders hope and friendship, both of which are crucial to waging peace: *"The more people volunteer all over the world and make friends with local people, the more peaceful the world will be"*. Volunteer tourism I argue can foster an understanding that regardless of our cultural differences, there is more we have in common than what separates us. Through such experiences one has the chance to realize that we are all inhabitants of the same planet, Earth. We face similar problems that I believe can be addressed better by grassroots organizations which however are part of a global network.

#### **5.3.2.9. Reflection on ways of living and being**

Essentially Sadhana forest besides being an afforestation project that strives to regenerate a forest it is an experimental place that is proposing a different way of living and being. It is not just a community of people living their lives in a different manner than the mainstream, separated from the rest of the world. Instead it is trying to set an example and by inviting volunteers to experience that way of living and being it aims at spreading these principles. As Kaya puts it

*"I think that Sadhana is not...it's a different kind of community...it's for education. It invites many people to show them a different lifestyle...an alternative lifestyle, like cleaning with ash and vinegar, using compost toilets, sharing, community life."*

While a novel setting is important, it is the reflection which the setting is triggering that results in new discoveries (Lepp, 2008). Sadhana Forest does not try to impose its values and principles. Instead it attempts to question the often unexamined values that are predominant in western culture. It invited volunteers to come to experience a different way of living for a couple of weeks, while respecting its rules, and then decide for themselves what works for them. As Adeline says:

*"...being here and seeing, makes you think about...and because they really apply what they believe in, in a kind of extreme way of course makes you react in a good or bad way...but then it makes you think, that's the good thing, Sadhana makes you think. So I love that."*

As the literature on transformative learning has indicated reflection is an essential part of it. By reflecting individuals may re-evaluate their assumptions. This might lead to a meaning perspective transformation, one that is more integrative, inclusive, and permeable than the replaced meaning perspective. Sadhana Forest, I argue by proposing an alternative triggers this reflection.

#### **5.3.2.10. Challenges and Breakthroughs**

Volunteer tourism is seen to entail certain risks and challenges, where *"feeling scared, exhausted and thoroughly tested is sometimes part of the deal... it might involve a certain amount of hardship and unpleasantness"* (Swarbrooke et al., 2003, p.8). Many volunteers reported having felt challenged during their stay in Sadhana Forest. For some it was the simple living, the toilets and the bucket showers, for others the lack of privacy or the vegan food. Many felt at first intimidated by the openness of other people. Some called it the energy. Several volunteers mentioned being uncomfortable with the spiritual dimension of the place. Some said that they found the '30 minutes of silence' practiced every Monday and Friday awkward. They said they did not know what to do, or how to meditate, or if what they were doing was actually meditation. Some refused to participate; others gave it a fair chance and tried to become more comfortable and familiar with it. Interesting is the case of Roy who initially had great resistance to this practice. However, he decided to give it a go and then he speaks of the morning mist during his meditative walk through the forest and how things

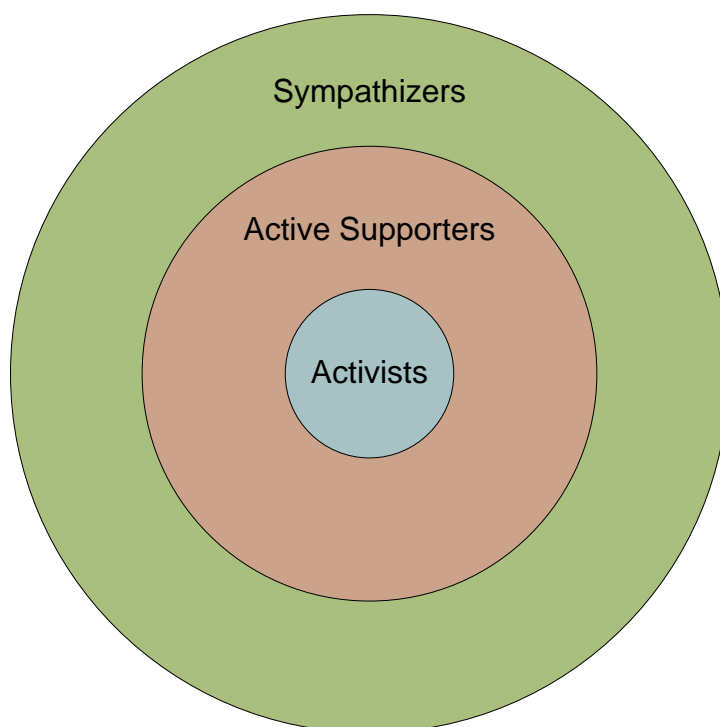
started getting clear for him. Suddenly he knew *“what i want from my life, what I want to do in the future...and I felt calm and confident...now that I know what I want I can achieve it”*.

These were just some examples of how the experience of volunteering in Sadhana Forest could be a challenge for the volunteers. These challenges in a way acted like disorienting dilemmas. The breakthroughs represent the revised meaning due to a perspective transformation.

### 5.3.3. Impact

According to Mezirow (1996) transformative learning should eventually manifest in action. Therefore in the subsequent part I will examine the change that volunteers underwent due to their volunteer experience in Sadhana Forest and the overall impact of the experience on them. In attempting to answer these questions two problems emerged. Firstly, the majority of interviewees found it very difficult to discuss the change they had been undergoing while still being in the experience. This problem was partly overcome with the post experience reflection that participants wrote and send me per email several months after their departure from Sadhana Forest. Secondly, many had difficulties in assessing which part of the change they would attribute to Sadhana Forest and which to other experiences, prior or after volunteering in Sadhana. Many volunteers were on a long-haul travel, spanning a period of several months to over a year. Travelling in India in particular (as some

were not travelling only in India) seemed to have had a significant impact on the participants.



A great part of the participants saw the change they had been undergoing as part of an on-going process. Matt recounts that his personality had not changed *“it’s more amplified my characteristic, I have grown up”*. Johanna also feels she has *“grown, evolved”*. Mariana says that Sadhana challenged some of her values, and made her re-evaluate them, *“or some things I took for granted and had never really thought of”*. Some became more sensitive or more aware while for most Sadhana acted as a reminder or a confirmation. As Mia states *“my time at Sadhana strengthen my belief that*

*my chosen path is the right one”*. Emily felt *“encouraged”* and several people say that this experience gave them confidence. In short, I argue that what Sadhana Forest does is to make people trust themselves and their higher truth.

Before looking more in depth into the transformation that volunteers underwent and the impact the volunteer experience in Sadhana Forest had on them I will propose a model that will help the reader visualize these changes. Ray and Anderson (2000) suggest that we should think of a target with three concentric circles when looking into social movements and attempting to estimate their true size. The center of this circle consists of the visible leaders, the demonstrators, and the activists, that are

on the first line. Around this center is a circle representing the active supporters and the zone outside this shows the sympathizers, those who might simply read the arguments and as a result make different choices in some aspects of their lives. The significance of the model lies in that it shows that supporters of a social movement are many more than those who are immediately visible. The center acts like an iceberg, while the active supports become visible when the tide is low or the problems are heightened. In a similar vein I will take this circle of activist-active supporter-sympathizers and propose that each of the volunteers stand on some spot of the circle or maybe even outside of it. Sadhana Forest I suggest acts as a catalyst, potentially pushing them further towards the center. That might be a small step or a leap; one might remain in the same circle or land in an inner circles. For example, one of the participants, Tanya seems to have moved from an active supporter to an activist. She talked of already having a strong environmental consciousness before her arrival at Sadhana Forest. In her words: *"When I consider how Sadhana has impacted my life, the first thing that I think of is that it was a turning point in my life. I came to Sadhana because I already had a very strong ecological bent of mind but coming to Sadhana I was transformed from being a thinker to a doer, from an idealist to a realist... Sadhana has given strength and greater depth to my goals. I have since already gotten some land to start permaculture farming."*

Ben who was initially at the outer edges of the outer circle reports that after his Sadhana experience he is recycling and has influenced his parents to do so as well, while before he was cynical about such practices. He remembers at work, back in Israel, using plastic cups and laughing about his colleagues that were making an issue out of this. Now he is the one who tells people to use, glasses or mugs instead of non-recyclable plastic cups.

Looking into the various aspects of change, I will examine change in values, aspirations, actions and lifestyle. What concerns values most of the participants claim no major change, some speak of a strengthening of their values, or a reconfirmation. Ray (2008) describes values as being the deepest and slowest-changing indicators, in contrast with attitudes and opinions, which change more quickly and therefore tend to be more newsworthy. He defines values as *"people's most important life priorities, the bases for what they actually do, what they want to accomplish, and how they want to be"* (Ray, 2008). In the level of aspirations many say how they would like to live more in harmony with nature and each other and with more respect to the resources, have a healthier diet and be more ethical consumers. They were inspired by Aviram and Yorit who walk their talk and by living up to their ideals and translating it into their Sadhana Forest dream. As Adeline says

*"What I find really, really good is that these people Aviram and Yorit, you know we criticize a lot society, well lots of people criticize a lot the system...yeah everything, but don't come up with alternatives, like...or some people try, but... that's why I'm always very cautious when I criticize because I don't have other propositions, but what I love in their project is that they propose something else, and its original and they go very far. I think they have values and they want to..."*

But then when they are back in western capitalist society they often feel it is too hard for them to live up to these aspirations or translate them into concrete actions. In Scott's words: *"Leaving Sadhana for the States I was truly inspired to live a sustainable life outside of convenience. However, I honestly have struggled to live up to that inspiration. My newfound connection with nature is merely a band aid for my personal wellbeing. My desire to live an urban sustainable life seems futile."*

However, this is not true for everybody. Mariana also feels *"it is not easy to incorporate that in our model of society but I do my share and hope to set the example.... I am much more careful about*

*things like water, garbage, the impact of cleaning products etc.” Furthermore, she has been experimenting with a vegan diet and once in while she invites her friends to enjoy a vegan meal with her. Melissa states “I began to value food that is made consciously with love and the land it came from. I really would like to grow more of my own food. Being at Sadhana made me want to learn more and do more! I have grown some of my own herbs and vegetables and I want to grow a big garden.” Emily recalls that in Sadhana “I realized that my inner child, the child that has always been existing in me, the child that I occasionally let loose back at home, needed to be let loose full power 100% 24/7...I think the biggest change with respect to my lifestyle, is that I keep feeding my inner child! I think, what would little Emily have done? I’m silly more, I clown more, I laugh more, I dance more! I love more people, and I’m less judgmental.”*

### **5.3.3.1. Readiness-to-change**

It is interesting to examine some volunteers seem to be more impacted than others. I argue that there are two key factors:

- 1) it depends on the length of one’s stay in Sadhana Forest or any such place, the longer time is spent the more influenced the person tends to be;
- 2) the readiness-to-learn and consequently to change which is related to the openness of the person in terms of how much a person can let go off the preexisting ways of thinking and acting and embrace a different worldview and lifestyle.

My observation was that younger adults were more prone to change, maybe because their pre-concepts were not yet that solid. Egan (1990) claims that in order to be ‘change ready’, individuals need to have some hope for the future; some dream that they can aspire to in order to go through the difficult process of changing their circumstances. Sadhana I claim can be this hope provider.

## **5.4 Sadhana as an (intentional) community**

*Yet a global strategy of resistance and transformation has to begin with the realities of place and community (Harvey 1989:276).*

### **5.4.1. Introduction**

In this section I will further explore the phenomenon of volunteer tourism in the context of Sadhana Forest as an intentional community or ecovillage. The aim of this section is, by drawing from the particular case of Sadhana Forest, to position this phenomenon into the larger social context and offer a macro analysis. First I will examine Sadhana Forest as a space. Then I will propose that spaces such as Sadhana Forest constitute what I term a ‘bubble’ and I will offer a theorization on this concept. Next, I describe the values that Sadhana Forest as a project stands for and I link those with findings of other socio-cultural research worldwide. Last, I point to the significance of Sadhana Forest as a case in the global context.

### **5.4.2. Sadhana Forest as a space**

According to the finding of this study Sadhana Forest is a space that has certain characteristics. These induce a certain atmosphere. Two main themes emerged from the data. Some participants regarded Sadhana Forest as a place for healing, others as an escape and some as both a healing place and an escape.

#### 5.4.2.1. Sadhana Forest as a space for Healing

Sadhana Forest I argue offers opportunities to practice an alternative way of living and being and helps volunteers to develop such skills within a supportive environment aimed at transformation.

According to Ben *“people are nice to each other here. I receive lots of love and support. Sadhana makes me feel like I can do anything, because I’m surrounded by supportive and loving people”*. Del explains how this supportive environment of caring people that provides safety is conducive for their development. *“People are lost, don’t know where they are going and so people maybe have some issues in their past, whatever and haven’t dealt with them, end up dealing with them here...because it is a safe place and people are given a chance to deal with certain things emotionally, it feels an awesome opportunity for them to develop.”*

Neenel thinks *“it’s a good place if you have some trauma; you know when you have some serious things that you are working through, and need around people to kind of support you”*. Mia sees it as a “retreat”, *“I studied psychology and I think Sadhana could be a really good healing place for people. Sharing energy from the earth, the plant and animals as well, but especially people, I think that can work much better than any therapy form.”*

Emily recounts that in Sadhana *“I was able to detach myself of so many things that I had starved myself of, or been starved of, over the past few years.”* Matt that mentioned having problems with drugs only a few weeks after his stay reported feeling a lot healthier both physically and mentally and happier.

Sebastian finds the community life *“therapeutic...spend time with people, meet and interact with people, its good, in England people keep themselves to themselves...(Sadhana) sort of puts me out of my comfort zone a bit. And that’s good! You are almost forced to talk to people, to be with people, you work with people. Whereas in England you can hide, it’s easy to hide.”*

One could say that, in a way, within the community people act like mirrors of each other and one can learn through the interaction. Volunteers are incited to face their issues as a result of the close proximity within which they live. As a result of the fact that people are more open-minded, caring and less judgmental, one is encouraged to cast aside any masks and show one’s real self. Stevie recounts *“some people feel they really get to be their true selves in Sadhana and I felt this as well. With a lot of friends I wear the mask too, I don’t get the chance to talk, really really talk. I had conversations with people in Sadhana, we got really really friends, we stayed up until 4 in the morning just talked and talked and that was so therapeutic, knocking yourself. For the last couples of years I ‘ve felt like I’m floating in the air and I can’t put my feet on the ground, it makes me feel crazy. From just talking and talking to people, hearing other people’s stories, things that have happened to them and talking and talking it really was a great sort of therapy for me. Cause a year ago I thought of go and see somebody...I have no big trauma or anything in life, but I just felt so crazy cause I never talk about emotional issues or stuff, I’m so ....maybe haunted me I never ever talk about that stuff, maybe with a girlfriend that I really trust, but I never...I keep everything boxed in. It was nice to honestly talk to people and not worry that ...I’m boring .When I talk to people I feel quite weak and exposed, I didn’t feel that here. I felt I could be really open and true.”*

#### 5.4.2.2. Sadhana Forest as an escape

The other side of the coin is that some people see Sadhana Forest as a form of escapism. Ben says *"it's very comfortable and nice, convenient...It's like a bubble, it's not the real world, you don't have to deal with anything here. I don't have to deal with my problems."* Neenel also believes that for some people *"a safe forest is an escape from the struggles of life, the reality of life and challenges of life....you do your work and then you have time...it's not hard work, nobody tells you you have to do this or that, it's very free."* Stevie also sees it as a form of escapism *"a lot of people feel so happy there or so at ease, I kind of feel they are escaping"*.

Whether Sadhana Forest or any space of that kind acts as an escape or retreat, it is worth asking if this varies from person to person. Is it perhaps that certain individuals just indulge in the comfort that such places offer while others take up the opportunity to work on themselves? One other question that comes to mind is from what are they actually escaping? Is it an escape from the self or an escape from 'normal' life, in the western capitalist mainstream society? Wang (2000) purports that travel is an institution of escape; it is freedom from the modernized mode of existence that is associated with rigid schedules, deadening routines, and stressful deadlines. And what does a desire to escape such a society indicate? Would it maybe not be more thoughtful to create a society from which one does not seek to escape or restore; one in which one lives in such a way that is happy to live in? Bubbles I believe can give inspiration and hope for such a society.

#### 5.4.3. Bubbles

Adeline sees Sadhana Forest like a bubble. She recalls a critique she read on blog saying that *we don't need any more community to create another bubble, that's not going to change anything in the outside world*. She agrees with the blogger to a point but then she says that if people who only pass by may take something with them and spread the idea then it can be something positive. I will argue that one can see a bubble as an escape, a selfish endeavor of creating a secluded utopia that might serve one's desires or even one's longing to live up to one's more noble ideals, but with little or no impact on the general good. However if we think of bubbles as 'hubs', that are interconnected with other individuals, groups, places, and other 'bubbles', then they can potentially foster the spread of such ideals, ideas, practices, and patterns. Furthermore, I suggest that bubbles can act as safe nest





within which one feels safe to venture out of one's comfort zone and embark upon a challenging inner journey. This concept is visually presented in the above figure 5.5.1. Thus these spaces can be seen also as trajectories or seeds for new structures to emerge, and grow strong enough until they can challenge and change the existing paradigm.

Strongin (2010) provides an interesting theorization of the intentional community, one kind of bubble, regarding it as a 'counterpublic'. Fraser (1990) writes of the "dual function" of counterpublics: *"On the one hand, they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics...It is precisely in the dialectic between these two functions that their emancipatory potential resides."* Strongin (2010) argue that intentional communities fit this articulation: they have outwardly oriented transformative aspirations, but would lack the energy, imagination, and resources to enact these visions unless they also protected their internal space of *communitas* and of lifestyles based on ideals. He concludes that the transformative potential of the intentional community counterpublic resides in its capacity to imagine critique-based alternatives, to model innovative technological, economic, social, and political practices, and to challenge the bounds of what is political.

In addition, such bubbles bring like-minded people together and they help them realize that they are not alone. Mia narrates *"I felt like excluded from society for a long time just because of my choices and what I want to do and it's not what the mainstream does. Like being vegan in the big world would be hard, you have to argue with everybody about food, animal rights..."* This echoes what Ray and Anderson (2000) had noticed about Cultural creative, that they remain hidden because they tend to see themselves as isolated individuals whose personal values differ from the mainstream. Comerford and Fambrough (2002) have noted that volunteer tourism is an activity that can provide a connection for people with common interests. Moreover spaces such as Sadhana Forest not only make people realize that they are not alone but it also fosters networking between them. McGehee (2005) suggests that the very uniqueness of a volunteer tourism experience explains why participation in it can increase network ties and provide consciousness raising opportunities. The high levels of interaction provide many opportunities to exchange information about networks and to form ties that might have not developed otherwise. Neenel for example says how she found out about so many projects around the world by talking to people in Sadhana Forest. Furthermore, McGehee (2005) maintains that these new networks may encourage participation in and support for social movements. Such informal channels are primary mode of sharing methods and techniques for action (McAdam and Rucht, 1993) as well as a major source of ideas and innovation McGehee (2005).

Mia exclaims how thankful she is that a place like Sadhana Forest exists. Emily narrates *"Going away to a high energy place like Sadhana, has given me so much happiness, just to know that it exists, to know that there are so many wonderful conscious people... that are raising joy and healthy, environmental living. To Johanna it gives her hope for humanity. Moreover Johanna reveals "I'm a bit scared sometimes, that I will go back to the way I was before...because here it's so easy because everyone is experiencing the same thing ...when I will go back home I'm going to be like not the only one, but not everyone around me will feel the same that I do and maybe it will be harder to keep that feeling"*. Her quote supports what Strongin (2010) suggest that communal values such as cooperation, sharing, and sustainability are difficult to enact in spaces governed by mainstream western institutions and value-systems and that they may be somewhat easier to realize in spaces

where all those present are committed to their realization and where alternative institutions and systems support their realization.

To Mia it is important *“to learn from each other, tolerating and sharing and all that comes with community living, supporting and entertaining. We need to relearn these things and in the world outside, these are things that happen occasionally, but don't result in permanent changes. Perhaps doing a 'Sadhana' treatment will have more chance at a grand change of heart.”* What is interesting in Mia's quote is that she says we need to **re**-learn, as Emily refers to the inner child that she **re**-awakened. This echoes what Lange (2004) has called restorative learning. Restorative learning is about restoring ethics and values such as *“honesty, integrity, fairness, courage, respect, loyalty, community service, and citizen responsibility, relatedness to time, space, body, and relationships”*, which have been suppressed under adult expectations, cultural scripts, and mainstream society (Lange, 2004). The dialectic of transformative and restorative learning is vital, she claims, for it affirms that transformation is not just an epistemological process involving a change in worldview and habits of thinking; it is also an ontological process where participants experience a change in their being in the world including their forms of relatedness participants restore their ethics and transform their interaction with their material, social, and physical realities, they seek avenues for getting involved in community issues that enact their sense of social and environmental responsibility.

In an email to me Mia wrote: *“These communities (actually not referring to Sadhana Forest) made of 'alternative' people who live their little eccentric lives in relative harmony, out of the masses' way, are so full of beauty, creativity and trust that they are like recharge places for my little lantern of positivity and goodness.”*

Emily says: *“Tapping into the Sadhana family network and knowing that it expands across the world...It introduces me to many more communities and networks. It gives me so much peace...Part of me wants to go off around the world and experience more of this. But when I listen to who I am, at the moment, I feel it's not right for me. I am very conscious of using air travel. When I came back, I decided that what my experience at Sadhana taught me was not to fly around and find all the other amazing places like it, but to manifest what it has taught me in my everyday life at home. I have taken action to stay where I am, in England, and try and access the English network of alternative communal living. Having access to land, and living communally like at Sadhana is very easy to do in 'developing countries' especially in India, but I want to be part of the movement that helps build that way of life in 'developed countries' like in England.”*

What Mia and Emily point to is that there is a multitude of places similar to Sadhana Forest, a whole network, that serve similar purposes. So one doesn't need to go very far away to find a place to get inspired, learn, transform and do good. Such place can often be around the corner but we might be ignorant of them. We might have to travel halfway around the globe in order to discover what was next door all along.

Kelly (1983) has suggested that individuals in contemporary life are forced to conform to social expectations and into roles that provide little opportunity to get in touch with one's self. Thus at first we might need to go physically far away, in order to step out of our culture and to enter this more open-minded and receptive state of mind of the traveller. Away from home and our 'normal' social environment, norms, habits, routines and reference groups we are more likely to open up to such experiences.

Haggard and Williams (1991, in Wearing et al, 2008) maintain that once a person has participated in activities that promote certain images, these images become affirmed. Then, upon returning, one might be more prone to access the less exotic networks back home and continue exacting these images.

#### **5.4.4. What sort of ideal are these places promoting?**

It is interesting to examine the values and ideals that Sadhana Forest and other such places promote. Sadhana Forest, one can say, is about ecology, equality, non-violence, anti-consumerism. Furthermore it promotes feminine values such as caring, nurturing, intuition, and values centered around life-giving as opposed to masculine values of competition, assertiveness, linear thinking and praise of rationale thought related to domination. Riane Eisler in *The Gaia tradition and the partnership future* (1990) discusses societies that worshipped the Goddess and argues that they were more like the kind of society we need today to solve the ecological crises...These prehistoric societies had what we today call an ecological consciousness: the awareness that the Earth must be treated with reverence and respect. And this reverence for life-giving and life-sustained powers of the Earth was rooted in social structure where women and "feminine" values such as caring, compassion, and non-violence were not subordinate to men and the so-called masculine values of conquest and domination. In contrast, within these societies the life-giving powers incarnated in women's bodies were given the highest social value. I argue that Sadhana Forest resembles these prehistoric societies more than it does the paternalistic societies of the West. Ghisi (2010) notes that while patriarchal values of "command, control and conquer" may have allowed developments in science and technology, they are obsolete because they do not enable an inclusive and sustainable world in which humanity might survive, and are unable protect planet Earth. What Sadhana Forest retains is more in line with what Judith (2006) describes as the dynamic feminine, a participatory movement, founded on civil rights and a unity of body, mind, planet and culture, that is about participation and process. Hill (1992, p. 17) maintains that "*in its highest aspect, the dynamic feminine is the synthesizing creation of new possibilities and new combinations. It 'does not come from a place of knowing, so much as from an openness based on the realization of how we don't know'*" (Judith, 2006, p. 203)

Moreover the values that Sadhana Forest supports one could argue are in line with the values of the Cultural Creatives such as the importance of relationships, a strong sense of community, commitment to social equity and justice, the belief that nature is sacred, concern for the natural environment and ecological sustainability. This is not to say that all the volunteer travellers in Sadhana Forest are Cultural Creatives, although many of them might be. What I am suggesting is that the place and its intentions promote these values and offer a testing ground for people to act them out.

One more point of interest is that in spaces such as Sadhana Forest these values and practices come together. As Mia says "*it was all there and it all fitted, it makes sense together...homeopathy, natural food, organic living, eco-protection.*" This echoes what Ray and Anderson (2000) have also observed, that the Cultural Creatives have come together through various social movements, including those advocating social justice, civil rights, human rights, world peace, environmental protection, sustainable development, holistic health, organic foods, and spiritual psychology and gradually have synthesized the values of all the movements into a common worldview. This I believe is due to the sometimes conscious and other times not so conscious realization of interconnectedness and interdependence.

One of the characteristics of Cultural Creatives is that they tend to be so passionately interested in their activities that the distinction between leisure and work and tourism begins to blur into 'serious leisure' (Stebbins, 2001). Often the Cultural Creatives end up creating work for themselves in the fields they are interested in through 'lifestyle entrepreneurship' (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000). Increasing numbers of people are setting up their own businesses in the creative field, because they enjoy being creative and making a living from their 'hobby' (Ray & Anderson, 2000).

#### **5.4.5. Sadhana as an ambassador for Transmodernity**

Transmodernity is conceptualized as a synthesis of modern and post-modern thinking from the critics of the prevailing modernity in contemporary Western society (Dussel, 2002; Cole, 2005). In Transmodernity the new emerging paradigm is the mix on an equal basis of rational and intuitive thinking (Pink, 2006); a re-emerging acceptance and interest in spirituality; a global consciousness based on global networks of information technology; a celebration of "glocal" diversity and interconnectedness with greater tolerance for ethnic, racial, and sexual differences; a shift in consumption, work and leisure patterns and values; and a socio-cultural shift in value and global ecological awareness and concern towards environmental sustainability, and a desire to live more sustainably.

According to Ghisi (2006) the essence of Transmodernity is being actively in favor of something, *i.e.*, taking active action towards sustainability and interconnectedness. I will argue that Sadhana Forest is a transmodern phenomenon and acts as an ambassador for Transmodernity. Sadhana Forest was born out of a critique and rejection of the western lifestyle and proposes an alternative to it. It combines the best of the traditional (e.g. huts built in the local traditional way from natural local material but with new more elaborate designs) with the best of (post-) modernity (e.g. providing internet and screening the latest documentaries in a bamboo hut, powered by solar energy). It celebrates interconnectedness, proposes an alternative economic system (gift economy) emphasizes quality over quantity and human over material (simple living). It aims in rediscovering the sacred as a dimension of the everyday life. And it is **for** something instead of anti, movement which is very characteristic of post-modernity sentiment. It strives to be Gilman's (1991) 'necessary yes,' a positive solution to mounting global problems. If we consider learning, it is not solely transformative but restorative as well. Lange (2004) claims that the reification of change is an extreme modernist assumption itself. In a world that privileges change for change's sake, there has been less consideration of what needs to be preserved and recovered. In Sadhana Forest as volunteer travelers recover suppressed values/ethics and forgotten relations (restoration of mainly feminine values), they transform their worldviews, habits of mind, and social relations and they might reintegrate these relationships and ethics in their life in a way that augments the transformative process.

By inviting numerous volunteers each year (about 800 per year) to pass through and experience an alternative way of living and being Sadhana Forest acts as a catalyst and an ambassador for Transmodernity. Volunteers get sensitized and further they get the confidence and the hope necessary to undergo change, no matter how little this change will be, and manifest this change when they are back in their homes. In addition these newly sensitized individuals may act as further supporters and ambassadors of the necessary change. Ben that has convinced his parents to sort garbage and recycle and Marianna that is introducing veganism to her friends are just an example.

The significance of the case of Sadhana Forest is that in my view it is not the only such spaces that act as a ground for transformative learning, pushing towards a positive paradigm shift, that some name

Transmodernity. In fact, I believe that if not all, at least the majority of intentional communities and ecovillages have these or similar attributes and therefore the potential to be ambassadors of Transmodernity. Many are already actively engaged in this process. Such communities have opened their doors and invite people to come and learn from their example, some offer courses, others invite volunteers or guest.

Our world is in a *“global crisis of wars, terrorism, climate change, over-consumerism, increasing gaps between rich and poor, social alienation, individual feelings of pressure, anxieties, chaos and powerlessness worldwide”* (Ateljevic, 2009). These days we witness a lot of upheaval in different parts of the world, such as the Arab world (e.g. Egypt) but also in Europe such as the M15 in Spain and riots in Greece. These events I see as only some manifestations of a deep crisis through which our world is going through. However my belief is that what the world needs is not just another shift in power within the same paradigm. Instead, in my view there is the need for a shift in consciousness. Ghisi (2006) maintains that tourism could have *“a new mission in helping people towards higher levels of consciousness”* and assist citizens in this transition. Allman (1999) employing Marxian dialectics purports that consciousness is shaped by the social relations and that in turn shapes how individuals are positioned socially and how they relate with the material and physical worlds. Bubbles such as Sadhana Forest I argue are spaces in which individuals learn how to form new social relations which can induce a shift in consciousness.

## 6. Conclusions

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In this chapter, a summary, integration and discussion of the findings of this study will be presented. At the end of the section, the limitations of this study will be shown and recommendations for further research will be provided.

The objective of this study was to explore the potentials for transformative learning from a volunteer experiences and the overall impact this experience had on the volunteer travellers. Sadhana Forest, an afforestation project and an intentional community or ecovillage was chosen as a case study. Moreover, I examined Sadhana Forest in its context as a community of practice. I have argued earlier that the scope of this study is unique, as there is no previous research on volunteer travel in the context of an intentional community. Furthermore even though there has been research on the topic of travel and learning in general, there has not been any that concentrates on volunteer travelers learning in the specific context of the intentional community. As Crouch (2002) notes *“knowledge is constructed through encounters, and space is important in informing this knowledge”* (Crouch 2002, p. 205). Last but not least this study aimed at identifying the macro significance of the volunteer tourism phenomenon in the context of an ecovillage in respect to the paradigm shift, to a new paradigm, termed Transmodernity by several scholars.

In regard to the research questions several interesting findings came up. Investigating what volunteer travelers seek from a volunteer experience in an intentional community findings of previous research on motivations of volunteer travelers have been confirmed. One major motivation for the participants was the possibility for learning. Volunteers wanted to learn about forestry, water conservation, gardening, permaculture, natural building, and alternative energies. Several travellers said they were particularly interested in the project because they were thinking of starting university degrees in related disciplines and wanted to gain practical experience in order to find out whether it really appealed to them or not. Meeting (like-minded) people was another reason for which travellers chose this destination. One finding that is unique to this study is the prevalence of the desire to ‘experience community life’. In addition, several participants were seeking particular information and knowledge that were available in Sadhana Forest as they aspired to start up similar projects in the future themselves.

The exploration of the processes of learning and transformation in Sadhana Forest revealed several key themes. Firstly, a large number of volunteers made reference to practical issues they had learned by working, living and generally by being involved in the daily life of the community. These activities revolved mostly around forestry, conservation, and land management that are related to the afforestation effort Sadhana Forest makes. In addition, many volunteers mentioned learning about permaculture, gardening, composting and other practices that are central aspects of Sadhana Forest’s effort to be an ecologically sustainable community. Afforestation and sustainable living can be seen as the key domains of Sadhana Forest as a community of practice. Furthermore there is strong emphasis on the experiential aspect of the learning that occurs in Sadhana Forest. It is hands-on, and volunteers have the opportunity to see many concepts in practice.

Secondly, the social aspect of Sadhana Forest was a major source for learning. According to participants’ accounts, a substantial part of the learning occurred through the interaction of volunteers that is encouraged by the communal way of living. Theory on communities of practice highlights the social aspect of learning. Mezirow (2000) acknowledges the importance of social interaction in transformative learning. This is confirmed in Sadhana Forest as much of the learning happens in informal, free-flowing, creative ways mediated through volunteers’ interactions. What is

interesting about this way of learning is the fact that it constitutes a different approach to learning. It is a less institutionalized and formal way of learning and does not rely on the presence of a teacher or expert transmitting knowledge to passive receivers. Instead learners must actively seek the information they are interested in. This way of learning constituted a challenge for some volunteers. However many more liked it for they realize that the 'classical' schooling system is not holistic and therefore not satisfying enough.

Other domains of learning were a mix of conceptual and experiential learning. Volunteers became acquainted with various concepts such as veganism and simple living, non-violence and non-competition, unschooling and gift economy. These volunteers also had the opportunity to experience in practice. Sadhana Forest seems to do a great work in raising environmental awareness as many reported how they became more conscious of the amount of resources they are using, such as water and how they wanted to reduce their consumption in the future. Experiencing a more simple life, in Sadhana Forest, many re-evaluated their notions of luxury and necessities. Some came to the realization that many of the things they took for granted in the West, and perceived as necessities, were actually luxuries and, although they might prefer not to, that they could live without them. It is also interesting to note that the notion of luxury was reported as being more to do with intangible things such as enjoying the company of nice people, rather than being to do with having material possessions. Also many volunteers mentioned a strengthened connection with nature. Veganism and Sadhana's attitude towards food in general (e.g. no rajasthi food, and no unethically produced sugar etc.) was another topic that triggered a lot of reflection and debate. It made volunteers to think of diet in different terms; about what is healthy and what is ethical. Many volunteers said that in the future they would be more conscious about where their food comes, how it is produced; they would buy more organic food and would consume less meat and dairy or cut them out altogether. The spiritual aspect of Sadhana was quite challenging for several volunteers, as it was too novel for them and outside of their normal sphere of experience. On the other hand, for others it was a great opportunity to incorporate spirituality in their daily life.

The communal aspect of Sadhana provided another field for learning. Volunteers experienced an alternative way to relate to each other, which stands quite in contrast to the highly individualistic style that is prominent in most of Western societies. Participants mentioned how they learned to be more giving and sharing, more caring and in general nice to each other, wanting to do good things, and make a positive change in the world. Another feature of this environment was that individuals were more able to explore and develop the 'self', challenging and expanding themselves through interactions within the community. Some mention how this experienced helped them get to their deeper self and inner truth. They felt that in Sadhana Forest they could put aside the 'masks' they usually wear. Many talked about openness, and how it was difficult for them to open up at first. Eventually, most of the participants recounted having gained in confidence. Interaction also fosters intercultural exchange, which is challenging but also offers ample opportunities for better understanding among people from different cultural background which can ultimately promote global peace. Sadhana Forest is a great ground for Indians to meet 'foreign' travellers and have a meaningful interaction and vice versa.

Transformative learning as theorized by Mezirow (1991, 1996, 2000) starts with a disorienting dilemma that Sadhana Forest I have argued can trigger. This is followed by several events such as self-examination; critical assessment of assumptions; recognizing that discontent and transformative experiences are shared; exploring options for new roles, relationships, and actions; planning a course

of action; acquiring knowledge and skills; provisionally trying new roles; renegotiating relationships and building new ones. It has been shown that there is the opportunity for all these to happen in Sadhana Forest. Eventually these often lead to a transformation in perspective that is more integrative, inclusive, and permeable than the replaced meaning perspective. This might then translate into action.

Examining the overall impact the experience had on the volunteer travellers I was faced with two problems. One is that the participants found it difficult to speak about change while they were still in the experience. This was partly overcome by asking the participants to write a post-experience reflection several months after their departure from Sadhana Forest. However due to time limitations both on the side of the researcher and the participants these data were limited. Secondly, participants had difficulties in distinguishing which part of the transformation was due to the volunteer experience in Sadhana and which from their overall travelling experience, as many of them were travelling over a longer period of time.

Most of the volunteers conveyed that the change they underwent was a continuum of their already chosen path; they talk about growth and evolution. This experience strengthened their beliefs and augmented their confidence. In an attempt to depict the change volunteers underwent I suggest to imagine three concentric circles, such as Ray and Anderson (2000) proposed when describing the actual size of a social movement. At the heart lie the activist, in the middle are the active supporters and in the outer circle the sympathizers. I suggest that the volunteers are positioned on a certain spot on the overall circle (or even potentially outside it) and that the experience of volunteering in Sadhana Forest pushed the participants a little more towards the center. In that sense, it made them more active in supporting the ideals that Sadhana Forest stands for. This move may be larger for some and smaller for others. I observed that two factors had an effect on the length of the move towards the center. These are 1) the extent of a volunteer's stay in Sadhana Forest, the longer one stayed the more influenced one seemed to be and 2) the openness of the person and readiness-to-learn and readiness-to-change.

Exploring the change that volunteer travelers underwent due to their experience in Sadhana Forest, in the level of values, most reported no significant change; they rather talked about a strengthening of their beliefs and values. With regard to aspirations, many recounted being inspired and wanting to do more, although not everybody managed to translate these aspirations into action. Nevertheless, many reported a change in their lifestyle and took actions to make steps in the direction of a more holistic, sustainable living as Sadhana Forest advocated.

Next, I examined Sadhana Forest as a space and a phenomenon within the tourism context. Some participants regarded Sadhana Forest as a healing place that had a therapeutic effect on them. Others saw it as a form of escape. Several described it as a bubble. I used the contested term 'bubble' and I further theorized on this concept. In my view, the term might have a negative connotation, implying secludedness; it can be perceived as an attempt to live a comfortable almost utopic life away from the struggles of everyday life. However, I argue bubbles can act as protective nests, in which individuals can venture out of their comfort zone and search their inner truth and reach their higher selves, a process which can help to breed strong, idealistic individuals. Furthermore, bubbles can be seen as trajectories or seeds of ideas that help new structures to emerge, and when ripened they can challenge and change the existing paradigm. Thinking of bubbles as hubs where like-minded people come together and share ideas, practices and patterns, these hubs



being interwoven in webs of other bubbles, they foster the spread of the ideals they stand for. Strogin (2010) suggest looking at intentional community, one kind of bubble as a 'counterpublic'. Counterpublics are spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; but they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics (Fraser, 1990). The emancipatory potential of intentional communities, Strogin (2010) maintains, resides in this dialectic. They need to protect the inner space of *communitas* in order to be strong enough to manifest their outwardly oriented transformative aspirations.

Looking into the ideals Sadhana Forest stands for, I discovered that they are very similar to those of the Cultural Creatives, such as the importance of relationships, a strong sense of community, a commitment to social equity and justice, the belief that nature is sacred, a concern for the natural environment and ecological sustainability. High importance is given to feminine values such as caring, compassion, and non-violence. Sadhana Forest can be seen as part of what Judith (2006) describes as the dynamic feminine, a participatory movement, founded on civil rights and a unity of body, mind, planet and culture, which is about participation and process.

Lastly, I argue that Sadhana is not only a transmodern phenomenon; a synthesis of the best of modern and post-modern thinking; being **for** something; proposing solutions rather than solely criticizing. Sadhana Forest also acts as an ambassador for Transmodernity. By inviting volunteers to experience an alternative lifestyle inspired by ideals similar to those of the Cultural Creatives it gives them the opportunity to try out new roles. Travellers may instigate changes in their future lives and become part of the paradigm shift. Moreover these newly sensitized individuals might further inspire and encourage other people to undergo changes towards the new paradigm.

The significance of Sadhana Forest I have argued is that it is only one example of the kind of bubbles that act as catalysts and ambassadors of Transmodernity. I suggest that ecovillages and intentional communities in general have these attributes. In times of multifaceted crises I believe that such spaces are seeds of hope for a positive transformation. And travel can play its role as an agent for a transformation to a higher consciousness.

## **6.1. Limitation and Recommendations for further research**

This study was an effort to unravel the impact of a volunteer travel experience on the traveler with implications for the society in whole. However the limitations of this study faced could be surpassed with further research. As I have mentioned earlier one of the main limitation of this study was the fact that participants could not assess the impact of the volunteer experience while they were still in the experience. Therefore I asked them to email me a post-experience reflection. However due to time limitations I did not manage to gather a lot of this kind of data. Nowadays with advanced ICT this has become much easier than in the past, and researchers should make use of these facilities. Therefore more research should be done on the impact of such experiences drawing from post-experience accounts. Ideal would be to conduct more longitudinal studies, as these allow the exploration of change over time.

Furthermore, I believe there is need for more research examining the potential of tourism as an agent for consciousness raising, learning, transformation and positive change. Travelling to places such as Sadhana Forest I have argued that has these transformative dynamics. However Sadhana Forest is only one example of such spaces that I termed 'bubbles', but there are many more which

could be researched. There are many more intentional communities that vary in their intentions and characteristics. For example one could think of an urban ecovillage as opposed to a rural one in a less economically developed country, such as Sadhana Forest in India. Also, some of the less permanent spaces and events, I suggest, have some of the characteristics and transformative dynamics of a 'bubble', such as festivals, rainbow gatherings etc. Even social centers and other spaces that act like little oases within the western mainstream society contain some of these 'bubble' characteristics.

Moreover, research can be done in ways to facilitate and enhance learning and transformation within a travel experience. Questions can be asked as to what structures need to be created in order to support this transformation when volunteers return back at home. Indeed, what do the people who were (slightly) awakened need to remain active when back in their 'normal' life? It would also be interesting to investigate how strong networks that have been created through travel are and what is necessary to maintain them.

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