A Grounded Philosophy of the Other:

Global Education Practices in International Workcamps as Forms of Radical Pedagogy

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I.

Introduction

A few years ago, walking around the isolated hamlet of Vaunières, in the French Hautes Alps -where many of the conversations reported in this thesis took place - I interviewed a volunteer manager whose family came to Glasgow, Scotland from Somalia as refugees. After having been a volunteer himself, he had just taken a job to facilitate access to volunteering for young people from the same neighbourhood; a neighbourhood which by any standard would be qualified as 'difficult'. The interview guidelines included a standard question asking why the organisation wanted to engage the youth from the area to volunteer. The manager smiled, looked into my eyes and answered: 'and why not?'

That immediately became, very clearly, the question worth asking when researching the underlying philosophy of International Workcamps in relation to the Other and the global education practices put in place to translate such philosophy into reality.

First, this is framed into a simple but important philosophical question: what implicit and explicit theories about the Other can be considered the building blocks of the philosophical idea of volunteering by and for all, the agreed and shared norm at the starting point of International Workcamps? Considering this question, one of the goals of this thesis is to identify key common concepts that allow us to deconstruct International Workcamps as laboratories of non-formal education and experiential learning from the perspective of their key actors - the volunteers, the local communities, and the program organisers – and reconstruct a comprehensive, grounded philosophy of the Other.

This metaphoric exercise in renovation, mirroring the very concrete manual work that will appear as a constant catalyst of self and group learning dynamics in International Workcamps,

also explores the question as a practical one, answering *why not?* Often, there tend to be concrete obstacles that people face because of their assigned situation and status in a given intergroup environment that prevent them from potentially learning and appreciating the cultural and social diversity of the Other, relegating them to the role of a stranger. Throughout the thesis, I use the Other to name a subject whose diversity is capable of and stimulating relation, while the stranger names the moment alterity is fixed into distance through categorisation, fear, and practical logics of exclusion. Therefore, it is important to recognize what can be learned from international workcamp theory and practices to help overcome and remove the obstacles that make the Other a stranger, utilising diversity to support the identity transformation journeys of participants.

During the last ten years, I have had the chance to discuss these fundamental questions with over 130 individuals from all regions of the world, who shared their views and – I learned to use the term without hesitation – their philosophy. I have talked with volunteers before and after their workcamp experiences. Specifically, these conversations took place with local partners and representatives of the hosting communities that have been welcoming International Workcamps for years, staff and board members of the volunteer-involving organisations responsible for the recruitment and preparation of the volunteers , social workers and educators accompanying the journey of young volunteers with a background of social and cultural exclusion and camp leaders, representative of a role that will emerge as pivotal in the path of transformation through contact, social diversity, manual work and situated pedagogy.

This thesis mirrors and tests their beliefs in volunteering as a unique, and somehow radical form of personal and social experimentation for peace. Notably, through first-hand contact and cooperation, and working for common goals, the key elements for building the kind of personal and collective transformation that provide a solid foundation for identities and societies that do not exclude or marginalise, but instead promote and value participation by all. It reflects in its preoccupation and its methodological approach the idea that exploring the experiences of the

volunteers, communities and organisations involved in International Workcamps means accepting the philosophical discomfort of the volunteering experience as a theoretical threshold, and that as a place of transformation, the threshold *hurts*. The negativity of pain inheres in it: 'if you feel the pain of thresholds, you are not a tourist; the transition can occur' (Han, 2018, p.34). Having worked in the field of International Workcamps for more than 20 years, the same discomfort became explicit through the choice of approaching these discussions and exchanges from the multi-disciplinary perspective of an anthropology that 'doesn't tell you what you want to know; it unsettles the foundations of what you thought you knew already' (Ingold, 2018 p.107).

As a professional, I have supported the International Workcamps network in developing a solid and shared impact assessment framework, privileging large enquiries and quasi-experimental design to evaluate the common objectives of these organisations, their local partners and the volunteers themselves – and to demonstrate through data (Volpini, 2016; 2021) that despite the short-term involvement, volunteers in International Workcamps are indeed going through a practical and emotional learning and transformation experience that qualifies them, in the words of the writer Peter Handke cited above by Han, as 'not tourists'. Some of the outcomes of this approach did also support the unfolding of present research, such as the statistical confirmation of competency acquisition in different personal, interpersonal and social development areas by the volunteers. Consequently, this created a solid ground to comfortably explore the idea of non-formal learning and pedagogy in workcamps; and the collective work done to create a list of explicit and shared learning objectives, which inevitably – though only partially - influenced the choice of some of the coding categories of my 'informed grounded theory' (Thornberg, 2012, cited in Flick, 2018, p.13).

Ultimately, the long conversations with international workcamp actors convinced me, both as a practitioner and researcher, that the real gap in the understanding of the non-formal education practices implemented in thousands of camps taking place every year around the world resided

in the predominantly oral and situated transmission of their shared 'engaged savoir *faire*', to paraphrase Bourdieu (2002). It would be meaningful and useful to give space to the voices of international workcamp actors and their complex practices and interpretations – or their 'thick descriptions' in the words of Clifford Geertz (1973). This means, 'bringing them into presence, so that they converse with us, and we can learn from them' (Ingold, 2018, p.131). This is achieved by leveraging their lived experiences as the building blocks to construct a grounded philosophy of the Other, which is made of five core elements of practical knowledge: the facilitation of *encounters* and contact among people from diverse life journeys; the lived *discomfort* of personal and collective learning and un-learning and identity-renovation; the pedagogical role of the physical *spaces* and places; the unconditional use of manual *work* as relational catalyst; and the *return* as a consolidating metacognition element of the process of confronting the experience of learning and working with the Other to better understand oneself. Because 'workcamps mean to… to…yeah, help with deciding to move on and be another person.' (J., Germany – Volunteer).

I left my hometown in May 2002 with a one-way ticket to volunteer and have lived ever since in the world of International Workcamps as a participant, a staff member, a trainer, a board member, a speaker, and finally a researcher. The stories of the people in this thesis are not mine today, but echo at moments the path I followed, and at other times the one not taken. In this sense, they will follow 'diverging lines' at moments, but collecting them here is my contribution to illustrate how they can and do hold together across a wide diversity of experiences to answer the question of their common philosophy – a question that Deleuze and Guattari (1994, p.1) suggest 'can perhaps be posed only late in life, with the arrival of old age and the time for speaking concretely'.

One of the most important bridges to such philosophy that I have encountered in my volunteer peregrinations has been the dry-stone wall, its techniques and the learning potential offered by the fact that accessibility to the skills needed to build it is always mediated by the

local cultures: from the French Pyrenees to the archaeological ruins of Thimlich Ohinga in Kenya, the lava stones of Jeju island or the agricultural enclosure of Wales, building dry-stone walls is a slow and collective exercise in patience that consolidates relationships among people and the physical space around them, while creating intangible connections the same way that ideas work.

> Concepts are centres of vibrations, each in itself and every one in relation to all others. This is why they all resonate rather than cohere or correspond with each other. There is no reason why concepts should cohere. As fragmentary totalities, concepts are not even the pieces of a puzzle, for their irregular contours do not correspond to each other. They do form a wall, but it is a dry-stone wall, and everything holds together only along diverging lines. Even bridges from one concept to another are still junctions, or detours, which do not define any discursive whole. They are movable bridges. From this point of view, philosophy can be seen as being in a perpetual state of digression or digressiveness (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy ?*).

II.

What are International Workcamps: a brief review

A comprehensive data collection made in 2015 across different networks actively implementing International Workcamps projects (Volpini, 2016) indicated an average of over 3000 projects held every year, gathering together more than 42,000 participants from 90 different countries and cultural backgrounds to support local communities. The aims stated by the organisations concerned put the workcamp format as the catalyst for change within individuals and society, helping to break down prejudices and stereotypes, and promoting peace, sustainability and social inclusion through the common work at the service of needs and goals of public interest (CCIVS, 2012; Volpini, 2012).

Lasting usually two to three weeks, workcamps consist of a group of 10-20 volunteers from different countries - usually never more than two from the same origin - interacting with communities often in remote or marginalized areas with minimal and sometimes conflictual exposure to different cultures (Alliance, 2019). The attention to group composition answers a shared objective of *mixity*, a term commonly used in the International Workcamps network to refer to the intentionally organised heterogeneity of the participants (social and cultural background, languages, gender, age) that makes difference unavoidable in the everyday coexistence in the projects, and therefore a pedagogically workable tool. The projects are organized directly by local or national organisations in the hosting countries, and partnerships with international associations allow them to receive and send abroad volunteers in respect of the principle of reciprocity of exchanges. In fact, cooperation is not seen as a linear process requiring the expertise of economically developed countries towards poor communities, but rather as an exchange in which volunteers' movement is not limited to the institutional 'North-South' but is multilateral and multidirectional; workcamp organisations are not humanitarian in nature, but promote sustainable development and education through citizens' participation

(Concordia, 2020). In this sense, they adhere to the principles and critical approach of the pedagogy of the oppressed (Freire, 1970), working with active communities and minorities in fighting against exclusion in rural and urban areas, in all regions of the world. Fully engaged in the decolonisation movements during the 1950s and 1960s, workcamps were instrumental in building bridges between West and East during the Cold War. With the fall of the iron curtain, they have more recently become focused on reshaping globalized power dynamics and promoting freedom of movement, social and climate justice 'beyond territories and boundaries' (CCIVS, 2009, 2019).

Through a collective, concrete and critical action that is at once deeply local and globally interconnected and interdependent, these projects positively influence and trigger new dynamics in the very diverse social, cultural and economic contexts in which they intervene, strongly relying on the methodology of non-formal education (Coombs, P.H., & Ahmed, M., 1974; Smith, 2001) and experiential learning (Kolb, D.A., 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2009). Promoting a highly participative approach, International Workcamps stimulate and give visibility to civil society as a political actor capable of innovating. In particular, this innovation takes place through the constructive confrontation of different cultures at work in time-intensive, experimental micro-societies, fostering new paths across social and economic relationships, knowledge and active participation in the life of our societies. Workcamps are often referred to, including throughout this thesis, as "laboratories" insofar as they are bounded in time and space, facilitated, and scaffolded to allow experimentation with coexistence and cooperation, which are conditions that distinguish them from unstructured travel, casual volunteering, or purely task-oriented placements. They accept the notion of risk, within the ethical imperative of doing no harm, and explicitly represent an attempt at promoting learning by doing and using voluntary work as a tool for conviviality, reversing the 'decline in the individual-personal ability to do or to make' (Illich, 1978, p.30) and using volunteerism as a means of re-appropriation (Bourdieu,1990) of the results of one's own work, of common and shared physical spaces, and

of society. Work itself is then also not evaluated in economic terms, but as a meaningful voluntary contribution and a learning tool, representing the foundation of durable social relationships, based on the shared understanding of cultural differences and potential shocks (Oberg, 1960) and common, cooperative goals that transcend the individual interest and transform the very concept of identity (Allport, 1954).

Despite a centenary existence, International Workcamps have attracted comparatively little research in recent years, with academic studies on international voluntary service privileging professionalized, long-term individual volunteering while still acknowledging the potential of workcamps for both intercultural exposure, learning and effective labour (Lough, 2011; Lough & Tiessen, 2017). Workcamps have received attention for their historic presence as the oldest form of international volunteerism (Marcussen, 2018), or for their significance in specific geographical and cultural contexts (Badu and Parker, 1994; Ramesh, 2019). Often, research has put their activities in relation to tourism and in confusion with the for-profit initiatives of recent years gathered under the 'voluntourism' label (Boerma, 1984; Klicek, 2010; Gius, 2011). However, there is a crucial discriminant - in addition to the non-profit nature of the activities - being recognised in the educational approach, objectives and methods that distinguish workcamps from volunteer tourism (Junek & Chang, 2021). The distinction focuses on elements such as the reciprocity-based and non-profit governance of the exchanges, the locally defined public-interest goals, and an explicit non-formal education design with orientation, facilitation and reflection sessions around thematic learning objectives. Out of the 142 references identified among journals, books and academic theses between 1918 and 2025, the only publications on International Workcamps within top tier academic journals were either outdated in regard to the present context (Woods, 1980) or represent only a short overview in the wider framework of international voluntary service studies (Sherraden et al., 2006). Specialised research on the wider international volunteering modalities emphasizes that 'more research is needed to understand the impact of group dynamics on outcomes such as capacity

building and international understanding between volunteers and their host communities' (Lough & Tiessen, 2017, p.108), a declared objective of this text. The field is also witnessing emerging contributions from practitioners-turned-researchers that have enquired about workcamps' historic roots and modalities, in relation to the consciousness objection movement after World War I (Loustalot, 2021), and the Quaker world (Woods, 2022). Three key elements of this thesis were studied separately by researchers closely associated with the movement itself. First, the intercultural learning dimensions of workcamps' participants (Burghardt, 2015; Watanabe, 2021) and the educational impact of camp leaders, in particular through the trainings where values are transmitted from the organisations to the facilitators of the projects (Vitorge, 2008; Imre, 2020). Second, the technical and manual work realisations of workcamps and their physical presence and visibility in the geographical social spaces (Obradovic et al., 2024). Lastly, the impact of the workcamps' ethics of care on the moral beliefs of young participants and their active engagement in reclaiming forms of participation – the 'restorative commons' (Erni, 2025).

A text analysis of the declared aims and objectives of over 100 organisers of International Workcamps shows how the process relies on the hypothesis that the successful contact (Engle, J., & Engle, L., 2003), exposure and reciprocal acculturation of different cultures and social norms that happens in international group voluntary projects, acting as small social laboratories, can have both a short- and long-term positive impact on the individuals and communities concerned (Lough, B.J., 2011). Acting like an ethical vaccination, despite intervening only punctually over short periods within a larger cooperation timeframe, the projects guarantee a continuity of service thanks to their recurring engagement in the same communities over years and decades. Indeed, they aim at stimulating structural, transformational changes in terms of personal and collective knowledge, attitudes and behaviours in relation to key societal issues and challenges, and both community and personal development through the idea that by taking up the problems of the Other, it is possible to find oneself (Glissant, 1997).

Ultimately such a pivotal shift, resulting from the increased awareness and attention to the diversity of cultural processes that shape different societies, and the consequent acquisition of new competences, is expected to result in accrued levels of social integration, cultural openness, subjective well-being and life satisfaction (Cheung, C., & Kwan, A. Y., 2006; Kwok, Y. Y. et al., 2013; Han, S., 2014). At the sociological level, the program theory and logic expressed by the International Workcamps' organisations echoes Bourdieu's (1977, 1990) interrelated concepts of *habitus* (unwritten rules and patterns of culture), *field* (range of different objective conditions) and *strategies* (subjective and adaptive responses of the individual). By being confronted with new fields through an intentional process of desocialization, experiential learning and un-learning, volunteers become capable of acquiring new cultural capital and building resilient strategies once returned to their home countries, thus not only resisting the symbolic violence of their own societies but also contributing actively to changing them through the transformational experience of deterritorialization (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980).

Consequently, two elements of the cross-cultural interactions that take place in the framework of international voluntary service projects demanded particular attention during the research: on one side, the characteristics of the background context - the place - as interpreted by the actors themselves. This is exemplified by the anthropologist Geertz's (1973) concept of *thick description* in which culture is considered a symbolic process, and observations need to be connected with the explicit and implicit meaning attributed to the events by the participants. On the other side, the dynamics of the intercultural encounters taking place in small groups suggest the importance of also considering key concepts and theories such as Goffman's (1959; 1961; 1974) idea of performance, Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis and Pettigrew's (1998) Intergroup Contact Theory. In particular, these theories are important to consider for their experimental confirmation of the roles of recognized authority and overarching common goals in facilitating intercultural encounters. Additionally, Gudykunst & Hammer's (1988) Anxiety

and Uncertainty Management Theory is essential in order to further consider more psychological individual and group processes and strategies.

International Workcamps are also closely associated with studies in the context of international volunteering for development, but the thesis also explores pedagogical elements that resonate with the field of global or international service-learning. In this sense, workcamps also provide examples of structured service, intercultural engagement, and guided reflection that can foster civic and relational learning in international contexts (Hawes et al., 2021; Rose et al., 2021; Camus et al., 2022). A key distinguishing feature of workcamps is their solid anchorage in reciprocal exchange dynamics, both in terms of volunteers international mobility (which is mostly one-directional in service learning) and in terms of equal attention to the learning of the hosting communities; their emphasis on group-based formats reflecting greater diversity than in service-learning and encompassing collective living, collaborative manual labour, and ongoing negotiation of everyday coexistence intensify both relational learning and ethical complexity. In practice, International Workcamps do share with service-learning initiative the crucial role attributed to leaders' training and can overlap in terms of the pedagogical frameworks developed, with practitioner literature often similarly informing the organization and facilitation of workcamps and of service-learning projects (Kolb, 2009; Bárta, 2021). The founding principles of reciprocity and mixity aim at shielding workcamps from the risks that international service may perpetuate colonial dynamics or become primarily affective experiences, and explicit decolonising approaches are taken to ensure power, harm, and positionality in workcamps are progressively and deliberately addressed (CCIVS, 2022; Mwaruta, 2022; Driessen, 2020).

Utilising an interdisciplinary approach, incorporating theory from critical pedagogy, cultural anthropology, sociology and psychology was therefore essential in order to examine variations across cultures and social norms concerning the set of expectations, sanctions and rewards for individual behaviour that prevent, or support, participants to change their perceptions of self and

Others. Also, this approach allows the opportunity for groups to build resilient strategies in cross-cultural settings, ultimately contributing to the transformation of their own cultural systems by the introduction of new information (Bateson, 2000). The research thus examines the experimental nature of International Workcamps as a privileged and protected environment for exercising rhizomatic thought, the principle behind the 'Poetics of Relation', in which personal identity is mirrored and redefined through a relationship with the Other (Glissant, 1997).

III.

Participant observations

> Who does not know Turner's picture of the Golden Bough? The scene, suffused with the golden glow of imagination in which the divine mind of Turner steeped and transfigured even the fairest natural landscape, is a dream-like vision of the little woodland lake of Nemi, 'Diana's Mirror,' as it was called by the ancients. No one who has seen that calm water, lapped in a green hollow of the Alban hills, can ever forget it! (Frazer, S. J. G., 2009, p.1).

Who does not know International Workcamps? Hunched over Sir James George Frazer's 'Study in Magic and Religion' – bent for the 15 minutes of concentration that my 20-year-old mind would allow without wandering around the dream-like lake of Nemi myself – I first heard about International Workcamps in the library of contemporary history studies at La Sapienza University in Rome. This was a place where the traditional silence of academic archives had long left the space for informal gatherings of students, complementing their instruction through the loud joys of peer education. Learning from others – a characteristic I would later discover being a crucial element of the very structure of International Workcamps – it took me less than a week to organise my first volunteer experience, preparing to join a project in the city of Istanbul through what I planned to be a slow train travel to a slightly orientalised idea of the East, a personal celebration and implementation of the youth infatuation for Victor Segalen's aesthetic of diversity: 'Exoticism does not only exist in space, but is equally dependent on time. […it] is nothing other than the notion of difference, the perception of Diversity, the knowledge that something is other than one's self; and Exoticism's power is nothing other than the ability to conceive otherwise.' (Segalen, 2002, p.12).

Yet the inconceivable struck my naivety when two bombs exploded in the very same university accommodation that was supposed to host me, with 15 other volunteers in the centre of the city, and for the first of innumerable times I realised that while the philosophy of

volunteering draws no line between people, societies and cultures, reality does. Organisations around the world still prepare today for their volunteer projects to take place in a protected environment, in which all participants can work and grow, learning to live together as an experimental, futuristic society - a sort of vaccination against discrimination and exclusion that attempts to make participants go back stronger to face the personal and global challenges of their interconnected lives.

But the bombs of 1999 in Istanbul, like the bombs in Gaza twenty-five years later, constitute a dark reminder of the fact that even when faced with the inclusive hope of diversity, reality violently excludes. Reality discriminates. Reality chooses to expel the Other, with the danger of negating in the process our own humanity:

> Not only the violence of the Other is destructive; the expulsion of the Other sets in motion an entirely different process of destruction, namely that of self-destruction. In general, the dialectic of violence applies: a system that rejects the negativity of the Other develops self-destructive traits. (Han, 2018, p.2).

This thesis is an attempt at providing an immersive analysis of both the implicit cultural beliefs, and the concrete practices put in place by the International Workcamps movement to resist the temptation of such an expulsion, and utilise collective international volunteering as a tool for a radical and experience-based pedagogy of the Other. Moreover, it is a study of global non-formal education practices that are grounded in over 10 years of research and direct personal engagement in the movement, and leverages a unique wealth of field observations and semi-structured interviews with more than 130 practitioners, volunteers and community representatives in 40 countries (Appendices B, E).It is further supported by the quantitative insights provided by the meta-analysis of more than 600 quasi-experimental design pretest-posttest surveys (Appendices C, D), focusing on volunteers' learning outcomes. Thus, the thesis does not aim at demonstrating the efficiency of such practices – although it heavily relies on existing research I have personally coordinated since 2013 to provide evidence-based support to

the advocacy efforts of the International Workcamps movement. It is an effort to explicitly reconstruct through the constant comparison of the different voices and actions of its main actors the fundamental elements of a shared philosophy of the Other, put in place since the first rebuilding effort in Esne-en-Argonne, near Verdun, in the aftermaths of World War I, when volunteers from France, Germany and Switzerland gathered to reconstruct the town with the explicit idea that volunteering together would become an effective peace work technique and that, as the United Nations would later recognise, 'since war begins in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed' (UNESCO, 1945, p.1).

While the overall approach of the research is consistent with the idea that 'the principle of openness implies that the theoretical structuring on the issue under study is postponed until the structuring of the issue under study by the person being studied has 'emerged''(Hoffman-Riem, 1980 cited in Flick, 2018, p.21), inevitable influences will be evident and should therefore be made explicit in terms of the methodological, theoretical and anthropological constructs that are part of my background both as a researcher and a person, and whose shadows contributed to the perceived shape of the final insights.

Methodologically, the approach of the research and its final goal – to identify and shine a light on the components of a shared philosophy of the Other emerging from the actors of International Workcamps – resonates with the teachings of constructivist grounded theory, where qualitative research is always comparative (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) and principally abductive, in a journey that admittedly 'takes the researchers' and participants' standpoint into account' (Flick, 2018, p.9), and considers abduction as a virtuous and honest middle path between the purist illusion of inductive theorisation from 'neutral' data and the excessively creative abstractions of deductive thought. The strong presence of a sociological theoretical framework concerning the core idea of the Other as a stranger, as well as my professional familiarity with both the literature and the practices of the specific form of volunteering that are International Workcamps, thus suggest a posture of informed grounded theory (Thornberg,

2012; Urquhart, 2013). Therefore, the researcher's interests and interpretations, the tools and practices 'influence and determine the research and its outcomes. These influences by the research and the researcher on the issue under study and the insights that are produced are no longer seen as a mistake, but recognised' (Flick, 2018, p.11), and the 'dialectical shuttling between the domain of observations and the domain of ideas' (Atkinsons et al., 2003, p.149) is supported by the conscious choice of a first person narration, which critically examines the role that personal and professional interactions, data collection circumstances, and different and occasionally contrasting interpretations played in the process. In this sense, the present research has remained faithful to the core components of grounded theory as outlined by Hood (2007, cited in Flick, 2018, pp. 18-19):

1. 'a spiral of cycles of data collection, coding, analysis, writing, design, theoretical categorisation and data collection', which has taken place during ten years and has been influenced by both my own leading role in initiating and implementing research on International Workcamps, and the feedback and collective appropriation of the research elements by the network of International Workcamps movement in the same period;

2. 'the constant comparative analysis of cases with each other and to theoretical categories throughout the cycle', made possible by the direct involvement in over a dozen research projects across all regions of the world and across networks of organisations with diverse perspectives and pre-existing assessment frameworks;

3-4. 'a theoretical sampling process based upon categories developed from ongoing data analysis' that has allowed to finally concentrate on the three pillars of volunteers, community representatives and implementing organisations as the key stakeholders producing a common philosophy of alterity and intercultural learning processes in volunteering, which also conducted over the years to the analysis of selected 128 interviews and over 2,000 pages of transcriptions as a 'size sample […] determined by the theoretical saturation of categories rather than by the

need for demographic ‘representativeness’, or simply a lack of ‘additional information’ from new cases’;

5-6. ‘The resulting theory is developed inductively from the data rather than tested by data, although the developing theory is continuously refined and checked by data’, and codes ‘emerge from data and are not imposed a priori upon it’.

For this reason, the research only utilises the wide range of quantitative data collected during the different research projects for ‘testing’ the validity and impact of the learning categories developed together with the International Workcamps movement as background. Therefore, this research focuses fully on the dialogical nature of the qualitative interviews and the building blocks that the ideas they contain and produce instruct a theory and a philosophy of the Other.

Theoretically, the present research follows and mirrors in particular the work of Shaun Best on the ‘practice of estrangement’ and the complex dynamics of social exclusion and inclusion (Best, 2016; 2019), considering the global education practices of International Workcamps as tools to understand and reverse the:

> practice-oriented conception of how individuals come to perceive the Other as a stranger. […] Estrangement presented as a categorisation process focused on the maintenance of in-group and out-group preconceptions that are internalised into our own consciousness as a set of negative and unkind attitudes towards the Other as a stranger. Oppression or discrimination is then an actively co-created, constructed social relationship, based upon a set of practices propagated and maintained by people within the community (Best, 2016, p.2).

Reflecting the path of Best’s analysis of the sociological tradition on the Other as stranger, from the fundamental text of Simmel to the thoughts of Goffman and Bourdieu, the thesis looks at the strategies put in place to support volunteers and communities in recognising, deconstructing and unlearning the very mechanisms of exclusion. In parallel, the research framework is also unavoidably echoing elements of the contact hypothesis and its four conditions of equal group status within the situation, common goals, intergroup cooperation and

authority support (Allport, 1954). In addition, the research is supported by intergroup contact theory and the processes of de-categorization, salient recategorization and recategorization that are engaged in the intercultural process of learning about the outgroup, changed behaviour, affective ties, and ingroup reappraisal (Pettigrew, 1998). Finally,Gudykunst's anxiety uncertainty management (AUM) theory is utilized; and its study of encounters between cultural in-groups and strangers regarding how 'when the encounter takes place between people of different cultures, strangers are hyperaware of cultural differences. They tend to overestimate the effect of cultural identity on the behaviour of people in an alien society' (Griffin, 2006, p.427).

Anthropologically, the choice of engaging directly with a research matter that follows and integrates my personal and professional experience in the field of voluntary service represents a last coherent development of an errant course of study. Going from cultural anthropology and comparative literatures to socio-anthropology of development, and finally to the field of global studies, it is believed that 'Anthropology's real contribution lies not in its literature but in its capacity to transform lives' and 'there can be no knowledge that does not itself grow from our practical engagement with others. For what drives anthropologists, in the final resort, is not the demand for knowledge but an ethic of care' (Ingold, 2018, p.131).

Positioned at the intersection of global education, anthropology, and non-formal learning, this research also aims at contributing to the evolving field of global studies by addressing one of its core challenges: understanding how global interdependence and transnational experiences reshape human consciousness and social relations. In the sense proposed by Nederveen Pieterse (2013) and Juergensmeyer (2013), global studies extend beyond the descriptive analysis of globalization to constitute a transdisciplinary project that examines the interconnections of people, knowledge, and power across borders. Within this perspective, International Workcamps emerge as a living microcosm of globality - a tangible, experiential space where individuals negotiate diversity, encounter the Other, and reimagine global belonging. The intercultural

pedagogies, solidarities, and tensions that animate workcamps represent not only instances of globalization ‘in practice’, but active places of global knowledge production, where new meanings of coexistence and justice are enacted and reflected upon. By grounding the study in the lived experiences of the workcamps’ actors, this thesis situates non-formal education and volunteering as essential laboratories of global learning and ethical globalization.

Finally, the work aligns with the global education and sustainability frameworks elaborated by Scheunpflug and Asbrand (2006), who view global learning as an emancipatory process that links local engagement with planetary responsibility. International Workcamps embody this dialogical tension between the local and the global by fostering concrete acts of cooperation that reveal the interdependence of environmental, social, and cultural systems. They mirror the pedagogical aspirations of Education for Sustainable Development while critically extending them through an anthropology of encounter that includes the environment: an education that does not merely transmit values of sustainability but practices them through collective, intercultural action deeply inscribed in the respect and reappropriation of the physical spaces where the projects take place. In this sense, workcamps represent a radical environmental pedagogy in which nature itself is considered and rediscovered as Other in a form of global citizenship education that enables participants to unlearn inherited hierarchies of difference, to develop a relational understanding of global justice, and to build a relational ethics grounded in care, reciprocity, and shared vulnerability of humans, and of their fragile environment.

IV.

A common grammar of impact: inherited tools

When I began coordinating research on International Workcamps, what immediately emerged was the absence of a shared language to describe the richness of the practices and their impact. Starting in 2010, I took up a coordination role aiming at redefining the very vocabulary of the network in order to be able to assess its effectiveness; a collective effort that brought together more than one hundred organisations across the globe. The process opened with the global consultation *Volunteering 2011: Global Strategies for Global Challenges*, which I coordinated as a year-long participatory exercise culminating in the White Paper on International Voluntary Service (CCIVS, 2011). Approved by the General Assembly of the Coordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service (CCIVS) in 2012, it set a first network-wide objective: to establish and continually update a global mechanism for coordinating the measurement, research, analysis, and sharing of the impact of volunteering, and International Workcamps in particular, at the local and international level. In parallel, the 9th Asia- Europe Young Volunteers Exchange and the 3rd Networking Conference for Asian & European Young Volunteers, with the ASEM Education and Research Hub for Lifelong Learning, enabled me to train volunteers from Asia and Europe to conduct a first exploratory research around the workcamp's three pillars of volunteers, communities, organisations. These results were presented at the ASEM workshop *Creating Skills and Competences for Living and Working in the ASEM Area*. We then extended the reflection in a CCIVS interregional meeting, moving beyond individual competences to community participation and the quality of local action. That same year, I represented CCIVS in UNV's civil-society consultations for the first State of the World Volunteerism Report (SWVR). Although several CCIVS initiatives were cited in the UN Secretary-General's report, short-term International Workcamps were notably

absent, which even warned about the risks of 'voluntourism' – a for profit activity that workcamps are mistakenly often conflated with. This gap made clear the need for recognition through research and evidence-based assessment - an agenda I brought back to the network with a strong engagement to develop academic partnerships and participatory tools to produce targeted research on workcamps. Thanks to the support of several universities, I aligned, for the first time, field practice with social-science standards and co-defined with the workcamp organisations a series of shared indicators and objectives for educational and social impact. Through the project ImpAct (Creating Synergies between NGOs and the Academic Sector to Measure and Value the Impact of IVS in Europe and Asia), I established CCIVS's first official academic partnerships, with the Universität Salzburg and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, and led trainings, fieldwork, and conferences. This also led to the production of the interview and focus-group guidelines that constituted the starting point for my qualitative research. At the International Workcamp Conference in Seoul, with the support of Myongji University, I presented findings from a large quantitative study on workcamps (with over 1,200 respondents among the alumni of the program). These findings introduced statistical analysis and pretest-posttest design to measure change stimulated by the non-formal education practices of workcamps, in line with the assessment practices of theory of change and of program evaluation (Weiss, 1995; Rossi et al., 2003). In the project Changing Perspectives II, led by the French organisation Solidarités Jeunesses with the academic support of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, I worked to expand this framework and integrate the qualitative and quantitative strands of the research. With help from the member organisations of the International Workcamps network and representatives of the hosting communities, I redefined impact categories through grounded, participative analysis, laying the foundation for the grounded theory approach of this thesis. In the framework of this global participatory system, with the support of public funding from the Erasmus+ program of the European Commission and from the European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe, I also implemented a series

of thematic studies in the areas of cultural and natural heritage, social inclusion and climate justice, and coordinated a first training dedicated entirely to impact. Participants subsequently led their own field studies linking local practice to global advocacy, with some of the interviews collected by the partners also informing the present research.

The presence in the background of this thesis of the quantitative research framework I have developed in my professional capacities inevitably influenced some of the methodological choices, including the idea of focusing exclusively on qualitative materials to present a theoretical complement, rooted in the experiences of the actors of workcamps, to the existing results of the standardised pretest-posttest design surveys completed by the volunteers in the past years. The confirmatory nature of this initial research had guided the clustering of volunteers' learning outcomes into eleven constructs reflecting expected competency acquisition: at the personal level (autonomy; self-awareness; motivation and self-confidence; problem-solving); interpersonal (communication; language ability; group integration and teamwork; conflict management); and social (diversity and inclusion; cultural openness; active participation). The Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) and the short Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (Mattick & Clarke, 1998) allowed changes in well-being to be assessed, while theme-specific items were used to evaluate learning in specific areas such as social inclusion, human rights, climate justice, sustainable living, and cultural heritage, testing alignment between programme objectives and outcomes. A total of 663 paired answers were examined, looking at pretest-posttest differences as well as examining correlations and moderators: prior literature and early findings also suggested a focus on pre-departure training, camp duration and location, main theme, and the participants' personal data such as prior volunteering/abroad experience (Okazaki, 2014), age, gender, and occupation. The participation of youth with fewer opportunities, migrants, refugees, and minorities enabled me to also assess inclusive practices both in terms of access and outcomes to volunteering (Krossa, 2020). I cross-checked samples against the network's project database to confirm representativeness, while

acknowledging persistent mobility asymmetries that challenge global reciprocity in the exchanges (Volpini, 2021). Throughout the years of research and coordination within the International Workcamps movement, I have come to see the volunteer's path not as a linear trajectory but as a spiral of continuous, situated learning. In its most virtuous expressions, this process unfolds as a positive loop in which the growth of personal knowledge, skills, attitudes, and perspectives nurtures the expansion of interpersonal relationships, the appreciation of diversity, and an active sense of belonging to both local and global communities. Quantitative data also showed how this holistic development - what volunteers themselves often describe as feeling more 'capable' and more 'connected' – also translates into higher levels of life satisfaction and perceived well-being (Volpini, 2021, p.49). These outcomes reinforce the idea that the sustainability of the participants' civic engagement encourages further acquisition of competences beneficial to both the individual and the community. In other words, the personal transformation triggered by volunteering appears to regenerate itself through continued participation: learning becomes engagement, and engagement becomes learning. The statistical analysis of individual and programme variables carried out during the research, with positive increases found in all the clusters addressed, helped illuminate the characteristics that confirm a shared theory of continued social learning through contact and collaborative work, and informed this thesis' approach.

Three pillars emerged as a potential foundation for further exploration: the first is the idea that experience matters. Volunteers who had already participated in a previous workcamp or service activity consistently reported higher posttest scores in several areas, including problem-solving and cultural openness (Volpini, 2021, p.27). This finding confirmed the central role of practice and repetition - the act of doing - as a driver of transformative learning. The second element is the possibility that intercultural exposure amplifies growth. Participants who had previously taken part in another international programme, whether abroad or within their own country, also scored higher on constructs such as conflict management and social integration

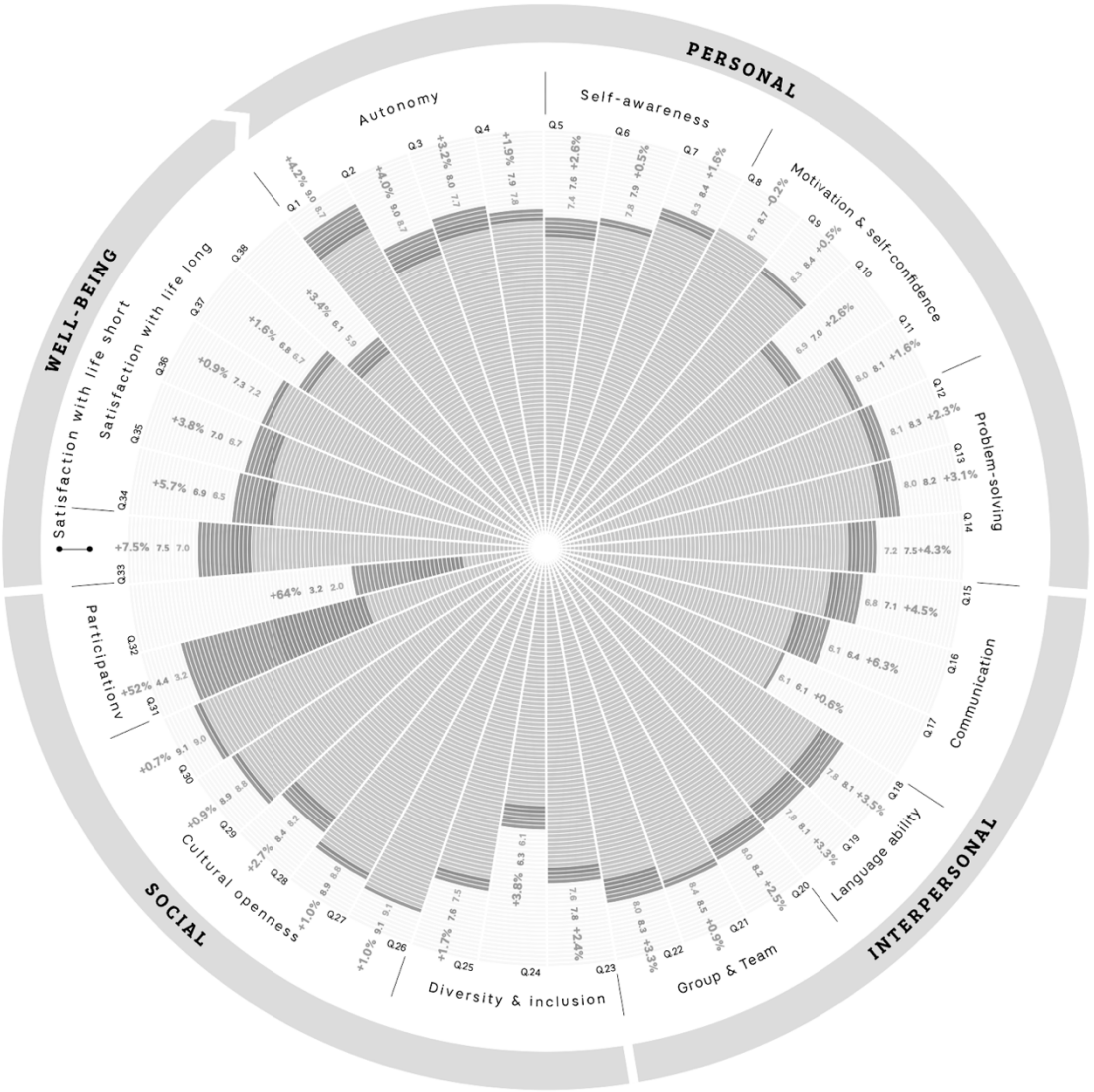
(Volpini, 2021, p.31). This underlined the importance of maintaining and diversifying the international and intercultural dimensions of voluntary service, ensuring that they are equally accessible to local and hosting community members.

Finally, quantitative data - introduced in Figure 1 - showed that meaningful work anchors learning. The degree of meaningfulness attributed by participants to the tasks performed showed a strong positive correlation with most composite outcome variables - from autonomy to communication and participation (Volpini, 2021, p.48).

Figure 1.

Pretest (light grey) - posttest (dark grey) scores of workcamp volunteers.

Adapted from Volpini, 2021, pp.24-25



This finding reaffirmed what practitioners have long observed: that the perceived significance of work, and the clarity with which its connection to wider social goals is communicated, are essential to the pedagogical power of volunteering.

These patterns suggested that the educational power of International Workcamps may lie in their ability to link short-term, locally grounded actions with a long-term, shared social vision, and that when participants understand how their immediate efforts contribute to broader processes of community development and peacebuilding, their motivation, learning, and sense of purpose deepen significantly. The thesis and its methodology thus reflect the idea that communicating explicitly – through a grounded philosophy of the Other - this connection between the cultural and social diversity of the actors, the meaningfulness of the manual work performed, the sustained engagement of the projects within communities and geographical spaces, will contribute to understanding, improving and further recognising the value of the experiences of the volunteers, communities and organisations involved.

Since Pierre Cérésole first described International Workcamps as a *technique for peace* (Cérésole, 1918; 1934), the three foundational pillars have remained constant in imagining the construction of a more just and cooperative world through participation: opportunities for short but systematic contact and engagement, enabling volunteers to take part both locally and internationally. They are able to work within socially and culturally mixed groups, where diversity and differences – including in values - become the catalyst for learning and solidarity. This type of collaboration brings about meaningful action, through which the link between local effort and global impact is made tangible.

Returning to these basics is not a nostalgic exercise, but a means of re-discovering and reaffirming the enduring coherence between practice, pedagogy, and philosophy in International Workcamps - a reminder that meaningful work, done together, remains the most radical form of education for peace.

The previous chapter outlined the evolution of a collective reflection on impact within the International Workcamps movement and situated my own trajectory as both a practitioner and a researcher within it. Yet the closer I came to measuring impact, the more I realised that the most significant transformations produced by International Workcamps escaped the limits of quantitative evidence. Behind the figures, the scales, and the indicators lay a dense web of meanings - an ongoing process through which volunteers, organisers, and communities constantly re-define what it means to work together across differences.

The research then turned from an initial collective need for evaluation and recognition of practices, to a personal search for a deeper understanding, stimulated by my own encounters with the volunteers, communities and organisers that compose the world of International Workcamps. The question was no longer *what* volunteering achieves, but *how* those who live it make sense of it. Making explicit the respective implicit philosophies of learning, the experiences of coexistence and transformation carried by their words became a meaningful objective for my research and a pleasant journey. As Geertz would have said, 'after the facts', grounding in their lived narratives a shared philosophy of the conditions that make an encounter meaningful, difficult but life-changing, and re-discovering a common language about the experience of encountering, exchanging and even becoming the Other.

The following chapters describe this exploration. Drawing on more than a decade of fieldwork - 128 semi-structured interviews, numerous observations, and extensive engagement within workcamps' projects on four continents - I apply a constructivist grounded-theory approach to reconstruct the implicit frameworks through which participants conceptualise international volunteering. The aim is not anymore to hypothesize, as the initial professional engagement in research required me to do, but to let theory emerge from practice, listening closely to the categories, metaphors, and tensions that recur in their accounts.

Through this analytical journey, I seek to return to the very origins of International Workcamps: not in a historical sense, but in the anthropological sense of tracing and reinforcing

– through their symbolical renovation - the conditions of their possibility today and for the future, the same way a restorer brings back the colour of an old Roman milestone to revive at once its history and function. What sustains workcamps, generation after generation, as laboratories of social imagination? What makes their discomfort productive, their impermanence meaningful, and their simplicity radical? The following sections attempt to answer these questions by weaving together the voices of volunteers, local partners, and organisers, constructing from their shared experiences what I attempt to describe as a grounded philosophy of the Other. Rather than serving only as data-gathering sessions, each interview aimed to foster dialogue and shared understanding, encouraging participants to express their own views on the real-world meanings of volunteering, learning, and community involvement.

The interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim and translated when relevant, with only the initials of the interviewees utilised to match them all throughout the anonymised systematic coding. Following the principles of constructivist grounded theory, I engaged in an iterative process of open, focused, and theoretical coding, moving constantly between the data and emerging conceptual categories. The analytical approach was abductive - though inevitably 'informed' as previously explained - rather than deductive: instead of applying predefined theoretical frameworks, I treated each interview as a site of discovery, allowing categories to surface from the language, metaphors, and distinctions used by the participants themselves.

Throughout the research process, I applied a constant comparative approach by systematically analysing similarities and differences across interviews, roles, and cultural contexts to identify recurring patterns and context-specific factors. The coding procedures were supplemented with analytic memos, which functioned as reflexive instruments to document the progression of my interpretations and critically assess my dual role as both an insider and observer in the field. These memos also provided the scaffolding for the conceptual synthesis that unfolds in the following sections, where the emerging categories are progressively

integrated into a grounded model of how International Workcamps function as spaces of contact, transformation, learning, and encounters with the Other.

V.

Encounters

Departures, arrivals, and contact

Perhaps we don't value what we do enough...
simply bringing people to be in contact
with each other is a huge job.
(G., Belgium – Organiser)

Threshold entry: departures.

The first emerging cluster of shared ideas from the perspective of the international workcamp actors depicts the very encounter among people as a threshold process that begins well before arrival on site. Camp selection involves considering diverse experiences. It compares learning in an environment rich in diversity to immersion in a single culture, emphasising the value of bringing people together and facilitating meaningful encounters:

> My motivation is meeting new people, I think that´s all. I wanna be…also I want to improve my English. I know I can do if I study abroad but workcamp is different from studying abroad so if I study abroad, I only meet… for example if I go to England and stay one year there, I know I improve my English, but I only meet people from England. But *workcamp is different, we can meet very different countries, and we work together and that´s the kind of thing, yeah*. (M., Japan – Volunteer)

Diversity motivates explicit learning by prompting curiosity and self-change. The pursuit of difference drives personal growth as an existential educational force:

> What attracted me to the Compagnons Bâtisseurs was the opportunity to *meet people who were really different from me, people I would never have met otherwise*. (G., Belgium – Organiser).

Motivations to meet plural others, negotiate autonomy, and travel ‘alone but not alone’ crystallize alongside the first gatekeeping frictions - parental permission, language anxieties, and unfamiliar labels. Permission is required before leaving, with family acting as gatekeepers. Parental fear and negotiating permission highlight the family's role as an initial frontier; a Parisian mother's refusal signals the threshold of autonomy for two girls from the *banlieue*, who have never been abroad. Departing becomes an initial learning experience, fostering intergenerational trust even before the journey starts:

> My mother said no. At first, she said no, you're not going anywhere. *But I kept pushing*...We arrived, Alban [staff of the workcamp organisation] talked to her, presented the project, and in the end, she said yes. (V., France – Volunteer)

Courage marks departure, a rite of passage where autonomy emerges through movement: courage gets in motion and self-empowerment is embodied by the backpack, symbolizing self-reliance but also community pride:

> I thought to myself: how am I going to get to this country? I've never been there before. *I'm all alone. How am I going to do it? So I grabbed my big bag and left*. (V., France – Volunteer)

> Parents admire the youth going abroad; it changes their mindset. (H., Cambodia – Local partner)

Traveling within a framework of safe adventure emphasizes group participation rather than individual pursuits. Engaging in collective mobility allows for structured risk-taking opportunities that serve as valuable learning experiences:

> Yeah, it was the friend [who told her about the camps], a lot, her personal experience. And also, *I wanted to try travel alone but not absolutely alone* and at the same time, I like travelling but I don´t like to visit only famous touristic places and I am not brave enough to go alone to very foreign places, or like unknown places, and simultaneously, I am a bit lazy, haha. That´s why I love workcamps, often they are organized at some forgotten place, I can

learn so much about the place and it doesn´t cost too much energy to me because there are so many people around me who I can always ask. And I feel it´s a way more authentic experience than just reading some guidebooks. (V., Czech Republic – Leader)

The search for genuine interpersonal connection distinguishes workcamp engagement from conventional tourism. This approach separates experiential involvement from passive observation, transforming travel into meaningful encounters:

I travel a lot; I have been to many countries for package holiday but it´s different. It differs when you get known with the country as a tourist or *if you are in touch with people*… but I don´t know… we talk to each other, more with some people, less with others, but… I don´t know, it´s good, it´s different from package holiday, *to speak with people daily, it´s better*. (J., Slovakia – Volunteer)

Organisations actively scaffold the progressive passage towards autonomy. With targeted outreach, preparatory sessions on safe space and inclusion, and cooperation with social partners that create a hospitable frame in which the first act of encounter is already ethical organizations assist volunteers with adjusting language, expectations, and procedures:

I think people don't have much experience in connection with foreign people, they don't know about volunteering, it isn't a tradition in Hungary. We try to *pursue them*, *convince them* that it is a good possibility for them. Our students meet people from different countries, and *they won't believe what politicians say, that every foreigner is a bad person. We try to help them to open up*. (M., Hungary – Teacher)

These pre-camp infrastructures and partnerships make whatever differences that may be present more approachable. As a result, it translates what might initially be a private wish to 'go' into a supported practice of contact:

It's not complicated, but it's complex. Many partners, donors, volunteers... it's not easy, but it's working. Now reality comes. It's a bit different from our policy. We think it's necessary to have a policy like peace in the world, but many times it's not possible. *Maybe not all*

workcamps are accessible for everyone, but there is always a project that you can participate in. We try to make it as easy as possible and to have everything-tools and resources-prepared for everyone. (A., Germany – Organiser).

> We did a day training where we mixed young people with fewer opportunities and outgoing volunteers… sessions on inclusion, safe spaces, how to feel free to express… and *the core values* of a camp. (T., Greece – Organiser)

Bridging institutions facilitate connections between the civic and social sectors, enabling interactions that encompass not only individuals but also entire systems:

> We started reaching out to organisations that work with refugees or with social enterprises employing young people with disabilities… We shared information about the projects and the opportunities they can join. (T., Greece – Organiser)

Language can also be viewed as an act of hospitality, with linguistic sensitivity helping to remove symbolic barriers. The act of naming is thus considered an ethical practice:

> Speaking about the work camp and saying 'work camp' to a refugee raised some question marks… So we changed the name and called it Youth Camp… We assessed the terminology we use and how we communicate before spreading the information. (T., Greece – Organiser)

A human-centred approach balances ethical awareness with administrative requirements, transforming paperwork into meaningful dialogue. This process humanizes bureaucracy and fosters ethical communication. Key aspects include anticipating risks through professional ethics, using volunteer feedback forms for relationship-building rather than transactions, and practicing micro-pedagogy rooted in respect - demonstrating empathy throughout documentation:

> We were lucky, but we were also ready to take this chance. We had credibility, we were there. […] Our main tool is the forms… the volunteer's background feedback form. We changed it this year; before it was too general ('do you need special support?') and people would say no - then you discover wake-up issues, behaviour, etc. Some questions can feel

offensive (addiction, personal hygiene), so you don't just hand it over; you work with the person and sometimes skip questions. (A., Germany – Organiser)

For the social partners engaging youth from disadvantaged backgrounds, youth participation in a project shifts the idea of integration toward subjectivation, focusing on people reclaiming control over their everyday lives rather than simply being absorbed into existing systems. It views mental health in terms of personal agency and sees psychological healing as something achieved through active social participation:

The objectives... *well-being, mental health and agency*... the ability to take control of one's daily life. (RC., Belgium – Local partner)

Host contact and conviviality, institutional interfaces

Once underway, encounter is made through ordinary proximity. The early days foreground co-residence and shared rhythms - walking, cooking, tidying, listening without phones - so that belonging emerges from everyday temporalities rather than programmed activities. Designed diversity (age, gender, nationality, background, ability) functions as a cosmopolitan micro-curriculum: young people learn to ride the wave of plurality, to translate across idioms and gestures, and to experience the contact hypothesis as lived practice, with a clear focus on youth aimed at preventing prejudice from solidifying. The effects ripple intergenerationally as families observe that communication and care are possible across linguistic and cultural lines, converting strangers into referents and memories into ethical resources for later life. Initial interactions and early collaboration among a diverse group yields unexpectedly positive outcomes. The shared rhythm of proximity creates belonging through the ordinary rather than formal activities:

I think we all spent a lot of time all just…*together*. Like we went to have walks *together*…On all the pictures I took, we are *almost all together…every time*. It was very nice. (S., Korea – Volunteer)

[I met] people from different countries which I have *never experienced before*. I was surprised that *how this will work, how we will get on with each other*, but so far it works well, we are on the same wave. (J., Slovakia – Volunteer)

To bring people together, in short time it´s really quite challenging work but…hmm, it´s possible you see [...] At this workcamp I was really like…how I am gonna survive this time and...but it was really… there *I saw what kind of power such workcamp can develop…yeah… and… the mission is to bring people together, for me*. *And in totally different context, not only for workcamps but also for local people who are more or less the opposite of workcamp*…not the opposite but for me, local people who are staying there are not the travellers and then they meet the travellers and also want to share little bit something and it´s quite challenging also when the language barrier is there but *somehow it´s working*, the people…hm, yeah, also understand each other without language…(J., Germany – Volunteer)

For host communities and local partners, volunteers operate as cultural ventilation, opening rural or institutionally bounded life-worlds to the outside while re-humanizing the Other through sustained contact. The encounter is explicitly domestic and ordinary - recipes exchanged, tools lent, time shared in parks - so that hospitality becomes pedagogy and dignity is recognized in the texture of daily life. Stereotypes yield not to argument but to cohabitation: repeated, embodied presence demystifies fear, normalizes heterogeneity, and reframes migration or foreignness within the grammar of shared chores, schedules, and jokes. In this sense, the camp is not an event but a village: a space where equality is enacted through co-doing and where the memory of 'doing together' anchors a new vision for the community. Initiating contact at a young age means inhibiting the solidification of prejudice, as childhood receptiveness can serve as an important asset in promoting positive social interactions:

I think it happened on the level of personal relationships, that *they became friends with someone, or they really liked someone. And they also saw it as a cool thing – international*

people. They first met volunteers in the youth-clubs when they were still kids and the volunteers were 'adults' compared to them, so I think at the beginning they saw them as someone cool, coming to us. And also you didn't have to explain to fully grown people full of prejudices, that these are international people, they are really nice, but *they met them when they were still young and open-minded*. (V., Hungary – Organiser)

Unpredicted encounters, with curiosity serving as a bridge, lead to new understandings. The initial impressions formed by the host open the way toward welcoming the Other. Intercultural proximity reduces symbolic barriers and creates global connections. Volunteers serve as links between local and global communities:

The sudden *presence* of the international volunteers really caught their *attention and curiosity* during the campaign, making it more interactive and effective. (H., Korea – Campleader)

Each volunteer has their own unique charisma and brings positivity. *Volunteers show us the world as smaller and less distant*. (S., Ecuador – Teacher)

Proximity prompts action and fosters engagement. Inclusive dynamics are built through openness, enthusiasm, and mutual curiosity and reciprocity:

Curiosity is part of human nature... if something is happening in your garden, *you want to go and see* what it is. (C., Belgium – Social Worker)

From my experience, I can say that it's easy to integrate the international volunteers into the organisation's different activities because *they arrive with a positive and dynamic attitude* and are interested in the work and how they can contribute. (F., Mexico – Local partner).

Encounters renew social imagination, presenting the Other as a stimulating presence. Local openness encourages cultural exchange:

The project brought a lot of fresh air in the local community, in the village of Tramonti because since last year they were not used to have so many young people coming from abroad and do volunteering work. So with this project I think we are starting to give an

important input about the volunteering concept and open the minds of the people about international cooperation. (A., Italy – Local partner)

I wanted to *meet local people*. So I already met some people around here. [...]There are other camps [...] but there are no *opportunities to meet local people*, so that´s why I chose this workcamp. (M., Japan – Volunteer)

One of the biggest challenges has been maybe to be *open to volunteers*, as they come from a different country, try to know about their culture, how they live and also try to *adjust to them and they to us*. (S., Ecuador – Teacher)

Seeing the everyday details of others' lives firsthand can change your perspective. Stereotypes shift when people live or work closely together; contact drives transformation and encourages self-reflection, and the perspectives of the local authorities and local youth converge:

It really creates links among people, I think it breaks a lot of stereotypes and prejudices, *I think it gives the desire to the youngsters to know more about it, to do more about it*, to do it again… I think it changes something in their lives, in their way to see the world. (L., France – Local partner)

We are all together in one place, even if we don't know each other, we talk. Usually, we only go with our friends. After the workcamp, we stayed with the little ones, in the park, because *during the workcamp, we got to know them. We were more open*. (J., France – Local volunteer)

Bidirectional learning happens through everyday collaboration, benefiting both volunteers and hosts. The exchange transforms everyone involved by fostering learning through relationships:

Exchanging perspectives with the volunteers and sharing our experiences with them is having a positive impact on us as organizers and on our daily work. They give us a broader point of view, and it is rewarding. (F., Mexico – Local partner)

Hospitality and everyday caregiving extend from individual households to large institutions. These practices involve shared responsibility and hospitality. When institutions and volunteers mutually trust each other, local governance is transformed into a collaborative process:

> The local governments at the site are vital to us, they are doing so well. *We explain why we need them to be there*, that they provide food, the space and security. (E., Uganda – Organiser)

Everyday rural life gradually opens up through repeated interaction. Camps serve as thresholds where encounters expand perspectives and reduce isolation:

> Make it happen, open people's eyes even more to the outside world. Let's not forget that we're in a rural area, and that... well, things are changing a lot, aren't they? The village is changing, but we used to be relatively closed off, even though we had this spirit. (M., France – Mayor)

Collaborative efforts such as joint tasks and constructive dialogue can effectively diminish prejudice. Cooperative engagement frequently results in ideological change and contributes to peacebuilding initiatives:

> When dialogue begins... we *break down all stereotypes and prejudices about migrants*. (G., Belgium – Organiser)

Mixity as method: diversity in practice

Designing for access means prioritising inclusion and equity, ensuring the programme is well-suited to its intended context, and maintaining a strong commitment to social mission. Here, inclusion is understood as an institutional duty, emphasising the importance of systemic accessibility:

> VIP stands for Volunteering Is Possible. The idea was to give the opportunity to young people with fewer opportunities to participate in international voluntary projects…We considered it strategically important to run such a project. (T., Greece – Organiser)

Daily life and shared living environments break down social labels through direct interaction; simply being together serves as a form of learning. This creates radical mixity, where traditional status falls away and our shared humanity becomes visible , leading to symbolic equality and unique juxtapositions. The camp thus acts as a threshold space: it breaks down hierarchies and fosters a radical education in equality through collective existence, where VIP takes a different meaning:

A former ambassador rubbed shoulders with a Romani man... It's surreal and very beautiful. They all have *the same fears, the same hopes, the same dignity*. (R., Belgium – Local partner)

Routine aspects of cohabitation - such as shared meals, household tasks, and time spent together - serve as essential mechanisms for meaningful interaction. This process of 'becoming-with' emphasises how daily communal living fosters proximity and enacts equality through collaborative activities rather than declarations. Within camps, these dynamics contribute to a phenomenological experience of sameness, promoting dignity, equality, and humanistic values in practice. Common spaces like parks and recreational areas function as daily social connectors, enhancing opportunities for interaction. Even in isolated spaces such as asylum seeker centres, increased social permeability and conviviality lead to contact zones that soften boundaries, positioning camps as exemplary models for openness and inclusivity:

They become a similar person... *experiencing a little of what they experience*, helping, sharing their daily life. (R., Belgium – Local partner)

Daily encounters with varied voices, faces, and accents foster learning and normalize diversity, making it part of community life. Differences become valuable resources that drive creative and institutional growth:

I think it's really important because it means they have lots of different ideas approaches, different accent which the kids really like . And I think it's great to give them exposure to different people from different places and that not everyone talks like we do up here in the

valleys. They have different backgrounds, different skin colours, different looks, it's really nice -and adds to the whole community experience. (N., Wales – Local partner)

De-exoticizing and promoting equality in daily life helps to humanize those who are different; when empathy takes the place of exoticism, understanding grows:

We normally think of Spain or Greece as places we go on holiday we don't think about people that live there outside the holiday resorts and that life is normal and people face the same issues there as we do here. (N., Wales – Local partner)

Kitchen routines, recipes, and sharing tools are daily experiences. Domestic reciprocity fosters social openness, while hospitality acts as relational pedagogy - everyday generosity serves as a means of inclusion.

> There have been many exchanges. I could just talk about all the recipes that were shared. People who did not use to come before really appreciated. There is even a woman from the village who brought her 'thermomix' [cooking tool] to the group, this lady is usually hard to take away from her house, we never see her anywhere it is great that she agreed for coming and lending kitchen material to the international group. (C., France – Local partner)

Cohabitation gradually erases fear, turning strangers into trusted companions. Over time, living together breaks down prejudices and replaces them with understanding.

On the other hand, in our relationships, I would say, whether with the local community, for example, it also helps to dispel certain rumours, where sometimes foreigners are perceived as dangerous, someone to be wary of... And when we see young English women coming here to spend their holidays working on the centre's project and returning safe and sound, without having been mistreated or robbed... So all this means that, ultimately, we can live with these people for 20 days without suffering any consequences and saying to ourselves, it's nice, it's a way... It's an added value. (K., Belgium – Local partner)

Families and villages view encounters as part of everyday life, emphasizing hospitality and openness. Visitors introduce diversity to routines, fostering relational closeness and a sense of community. The village metaphor highlights a space for affective learning, including intense living spaces like asylum seekers centres:

The centre's philosophy is to be close to our residents... we cultivate a family atmosphere... *having visitors who come to experience the life of the 'village' in a different way is a good thing*. (R., Belgium – Local partner)

Co-doing, such as cooking together, and attentive listening create subtle recognition in daily life. Listening acts as hospitality, and active listening becomes ethical. Also, shared activity takes precedence over conversation - a pedagogy of doing that uncovers subjectivity beyond trauma:

> It's not easy to strike up a conversation that goes beyond the asylum application... I organise an activity, *we cook, and then they talk*... I listen more than I speak. (C., Belgium – Social Worker)

Crucially, encounters are institutional as much as interpersonal. The material shows an ecosystem of cooperation-municipalities, schools, social workers, heritage authorities, and NGOs-where 'Access for All' is operationalized via leader training, adaptive forms, mobility budgets, and post-camp relays. Inclusion is framed as a process, not a single placement. Without continuity, the experience risks reverting to 'a great holiday' rather than a developmental arc. Networked contact effects matter: knowing someone who knows migrants, or witnessing volunteers at work, lowers prejudice among bystanders and officials alike. In this architecture, presence precedes persuasion; doing together reorganizes institutional trust and widens the circle of actors who can host, follow up, and sustain change.

The encounter is thus also pedagogical through the very place where it happens. Heritage sites, community spaces, and environmental projects become learning landscapes where volunteers and residents co-produce meaning. 'Mute' places are made to speak through

storytelling, simulation, and craft; stone walls, shelters, murals, and trails materialize memory and belonging, while children's activities, guided paths, and festivals embed new narratives in local repertoires. These tangible traces - what will appear in the Work as relation and Return chapters, when participants later revisit with pride their practical realisations - anchor the social encounter in matter, rendering cosmopolitanism durable because it is built, touched, and used.

Prioritising presence before action, embodied patience forms an ethical approach where relational time comes before productivity. Time itself teaches. In fact, waiting before acting demonstrates humility and presence - essential for ethical engagement:

> It's not the first day we're going to have lots of residents coming in... It's more important to simply go and talk to them... *take the time* to sit down with them and not start working straight away. (C., Belgium – Social Worker).

Discovering asylum centres reveals an overlooked social world, challenging ignorance with empathy. These encounters break stereotypes and prompt learning through shock, as abstract notions of migrants become personal and humanised, to the extent of re-orienting personal interests and careers:

> I was completely unaware of this reality. I didn't even know that asylum centres existed... I discovered a totally different reality, still harsh, but different and very *human*. And it was through these activities that I was introduced to the subject of asylum seeking and immigration. (C., Belgium – Social Worker)

Visibility and (de-)narratives

Experiential approaches to interculturality position foreignness as a catalyst for learning, where tangible exposure to other cultures replaces abstract methods of teaching openness:

> Society expects something different from them. The gap will become bigger and bigger, if they don't understand that *learning is possible*. That we speak different languages; it is a

huge thing for them. *To experience that we have to respect people that we don't even understand, that people live following different rules, different values*. *These things you can't teach without real life experiences*. When volunteers join us in the youth-clubs, the kids meet people who speak different languages, they are proud when they learn new words. When volunteers teach them games and they have to understand the instructions without using their mother-tongue, *learning new rules to the same game*, these are major experiences for them. Or when they taste cheese from France, they see different flags, they hear about mountains, nature in other countries, maybe it seems nothing, but the fact that maybe in the 7th grade when they learn geography, or they hear about a foreign country in the news, *they will have a reference and they will remember*, this is huge, and I believe that this will have an effect on their children too. (I., Hungary – Local partner)

> It is very interesting for the children to know other cultures, as well as for each volunteer, as there are volunteers from many countries and everyone can share information about their heritage. [...] things that the kids did not know, and they wanted to know, it got them interested. [...] Overall as influences, they know other cultures and with that also other food, music. But *there is an exchange above all, the kids also show us their country, what their heritage means to them*. (F., Mexico – Volunteer)

Intergenerational inclusion and cross-cultural connections also influence the dynamics within family structures, well beyond the end of the camps:

I met one of the parents and she said that first she was afraid how would it work, cause she can't speak English, but then the students helped her to communicate, and she said that in the end it was perfect, so maybe we also helped parents to be more openminded. (M., Hungary – Teacher)

> I remember I wrote there that I really want to be part of these kids' memories. Because this is all you can do, of course you give them something, but I think of my childhood, and you know, if your days are all the same then you don't create a memory. But if you meet a

stranger, or when you do something with people you don't know, and create something together, then you will remember when you grow up. It's about creating meaningful memories. (R., Hungary – Volunteer)

We hung photos of each volunteer, so the kids *remember*. (S., Cambodia – Local partner)

Beyond the small interaction spaces of the camp, volunteers' encounters can break down stereotypes to the level of building interfaith and interethnic empathy and coexistence, crossing symbolic boundaries. The experience of difference transforms into a collective gesture of peace at the symbolic threshold of otherness:

You cannot speak about diversity without a diverse group. In all the processes - from before, during, after - there needs to be diversity. (A., Germany – Organiser)

Examination of boundaries and underlying tensions reveals points at which discomfort may arise, and challenges the classic contact hypothesis. Instances of prejudice may be articulated but are subsequently reconsidered or revised:

It was very nice that one of them is a Muslim... I did not know about it... and when they came here yesterday, he was interested in the Jewish culture. He wanted to learn something new. So it was very nice. And after having a talk we went to the grave of Rabbi Shabbatai HaKohen to pray there... so he prayed there for the peace... it was very nice. *Simply to have here someone who is Muslim and decide to work at the Jewish cemetery*. Which is a very interesting act. (J., Czech Republic – Local partner)

There was someone who told me: 'ha!, these youngsters are good people, even the Algerian ones.' As we had an Algerian on the workcamp [...] And someone else told me: '*this has changed totally my way of looking at others*'. You see, through these two testimonies, I think we simply achieved our aim. (M., France – Mayor)

Micro-diplomacy initiatives in divided environments effectively utilise language and symbolism to mitigate ethnic tensions. Consistent co-presence in daily life establishes shared

norms and drives lasting change, and workcamps foster micro-histories that contribute to historical reconciliation and long-term cultural shifts:

> There has been a change. Because, over the last 15 years, *attitudes have changed*. Especially among Germans. The Iron Curtain was still there. So there was still some reluctance towards the Eastern Bloc. Then, once it came down, we had Russians, we had East Germans, we had West Germans... and the amalgamation took place gradually in the camps... and there, I saw a phenomenal change. **(**L., Belgium – Local partner)

> The main idea is to do the project, not to be patriots divided ethnically: […] but the first thing, like the first reaction from people is in ethnicity… So we tried to fit in the community, if they're Serbians put the banner in Serbian not Albanian or Macedonian or another language, in other places we try not to put all in Serbian to make sure everything is okay. And then in the end we get a call from them, because there are three municipalities divided, we had a meeting with all of them and with the main actors and *they saw that it's the same project in every community, it's like an equal cooperation, so they also started to cooperate with us, and among them*. (V., North Macedonia – Coordinator)

Finally, interviewees recall boundary-testing moments during the first contact that already foreshadow the next chapter on *discomfort*. Micro-diplomacy around language and symbols in divided settings, interfaith gestures and the cultivation of non-offensive communication reframe friction as pedagogy rather than failure. Participants and officials narrate explicit stereotype rupture - sometimes awkwardly, often candidly - as a product of embedded, supported contact. In this way, *encounters* culminate not in consensus but in a prepared vulnerability: a willingness to face tension, recalibrate expectations, and carry the relational work forward into the transformative labour of discomfort. Ultimately, contact serves as a first threshold experience that fosters transformative learning and conscientization. Through the application of

inclusion strategies, it establishes a foundation for a *place-as-pedagogy* where participants confront their own prejudices and limits and can decide to change:

> Honestly, I was a bit racist. I was a bit homophobic. I was a bit xenophobic. And I thought it was normal, I told myself, 'It's okay, you can be a bit racist, no problem'. Now I don't think that anymore. *Volunteering changed completely my point of view on the others, and on myself.*' (J., Lithuania - Volunteer)

> Wherever we run a camp, we try to create three weeks in which you have *the right to be someone else* - not the person your neighbourhood or family fixed you into. Here it happens faster; elsewhere it's the same process, just slower.' (N., France – Organiser)

This chapter showed how encounters in International Workcamps are intentionally structured events rather than spontaneous or neutral occurrences, wherein differences are made apparent, articulated, and negotiated. Through initial interactions and negotiations, language selection, and symbolic actions, participants begin to challenge inherited notions of belonging and exclusion. Here, encounter is presented as a foundational pedagogical threshold: it does not eliminate difference but instead makes it inevitable and relational. But meaningful learning deepens when the openness of initial contact leads to moments characterized by tension, vulnerability, and uncertainty. The following chapter thus focuses on discomfort as a central element of transformative learning, exploring how experiences of unease, anxiety, and emotional exposure constitute an essential progression of the encounter.

VI.

Discomfort

Transformative and emotional processes

It's not that I want conflict to happen,
but a little bit yes…
You know, like that level of conflict where
people realise that there are differences
(L., France – Camp leader)

Anxiety and uncertainty management

The materials in this chapter present discomfort not as an unfortunate by-product of volunteering but as the principal threshold through which transformation becomes thinkable and lived. Participants repeatedly frame unease - linguistic awkwardness, unfamiliar routines, separation from home - as a catalyst that moves them from intention to agency. Gesture substitutes for language, fear is reinterpreted as the price of entry, and the very act of 'stepping out' is narrated as a first ethical decision. In this sense, anxiety management is reframed as empowerment: volunteers and leaders treat the camp as a designed passage in which coping strategies (improvisation, mimicry, collective assistance) are not merely adaptive but pedagogical. The learning that follows is affectively charged and cumulative, converting the initial shock of encounter into a disciplined willingness to try, fail, and try again.

Pain serves as a catalyst for heightened awareness. Emotional labour and openness to vulnerability are integral components of effective engagement. Demonstrating the courage to participate actively is essential, while managing anxiety can be reframed as an empowering action that enhances connection beyond language alone:

> I give advice to them that, hmm… *don´t be afraid* to join this workcamp and to have strong mind to stand something, yeah. And if someone cannot speak English, it doesn´t matter because there are some people who cannot speak English in this camp, in here. But *they can communicate*, using gesture, and there are some people who understand, for example, Belgium people, he can speak English, and he can speak French with other member from France, so he always translated to him. So, yeah, so it doesn´t matter if someone doesn´t speak English, so, yeah. Those are advices I give someone. (M., Japan – Volunteer)

This also traces the progression from anxiety to relational fluency through living together and participating in shared activities:

> The *biggest fear was to communicate with people* from around the world and also *to cooperate with each other*. That was the biggest fear for me. And *I think we overcame, yes, through the working together, talking a lot and living together*. (M., Japan – Volunteer)

Detachment from seeking others' approval brings about desocialisation. The anxiety that once dictated behaviour shifts into a sense of freedom, flaws become a sign of belonging and courage to speak begins the unravelling of fear:

> The first days was like I was very silent and I was afraid to speak. But then I realized that I need to, and *nobody actually cares* about if you speak with or without mistakes and that you can always speak somehow, by gestures, pantomime or so, body language is perfect. (V., Czech Republic – Leader)

Resilience pedagogy emphasises the importance of treating contingency as a valuable skill, promoting adaptability in uncertain situations:

> For sure it gave me more self-esteem, that I can do more and I am more secure doing many things, also *some reconciliation or easier coping with things when they are not according to me or a plan*, because at workcamps almost nothing goes according to plan. (V., Czech Republic – Leader)

As a non-formal education practice, workcamps actually do usually go according to plan – as the chapter on Work as relation will further elucidate in particular – but the objective is to provide a safe and assisted rehearsal for adulthood and life, mistakes and adaptation included, unlocking the volunteer potential:

> It's not real life either... but it's close... being on a workcamp *encourages independence, and confidence*. (M., Belgium – Local partner)
>
> > Often, they need that little push to get them going. He didn't want to go because he had to take the train... you come from Afghanistan, believe in yourself, you can make it to Marche-en-Famenne. (N., Belgium – Local partner)

In a protected environment, repeated exposure to shock can lead to metamorphosis, as discomfort gradually shifts into a habit of openness. Moving safely through threshold shock and liminal experiences leads to experiential learning, becoming a strong educational influence:

> In a country like Lithuania, you don't see all kinds of people. It's changing, but slowly. My pace was really fast because *I had a lot of shocks here. Bam! Every day, like shock, shock, shock*. (J., Lithuania – Organiser)

Simplicity and austerity as freedom

Discomfort also works by strategic dislocation. Leaving 'regular life' suspends familiar scripts and opens space for self-authored motivation. Volunteers describe testing whether they can live away from family, act without external reward, and let praxis shape motivation rather than the reverse. This existential resetting is mirrored cognitively: cross-narrative exchanges unsettle prejudices and even national historiographies and normalize a plural truth. The result is a double movement of desocialisation and resocialisation - shedding inherited certainties while acquiring a new repertoire of embodied and interpretive competences that make difference liveable.

Adaptation for successful coexistence can be achieved by deliberately cultivating communal living and using shared spaces as opportunities for personal growth. Through processes like desocialisation and dislocation, confronting people, insects, or work, individuals develop agency as a guiding principle for self-structure:

> Before I came to workcamp, for me *it´s hard to live with others* for example, so I lived by myself (M., Japan – Volunteer)
>
> At first the heat and insects made me angry, then I realized *it was me who had to adapt*.(J., Argentina - Volunteer)
>
> I wanted to kind of *test myself if I can live away from my family, away from my comfort zone*, will it be ok…And also, I really wanted to do something – of course it's a job, you are there, you have things to do – but still, not an ordinary job, you are there, you do something really with your good intention, without expecting nothing. So before starting to work I really wanted to do something like this, to give something from myself, I will improvise it, it will be shaped by my motivations, not like someone would tell me, ok do this – no, it was different, we created something and we gave it, I really wanted to do this. (R., Hungary – Volunteer)

Despite being an organised 'simulation' of life, the moment of initiation marks a re-entry into real life, moving beyond established routines. This act represents a step toward a more authentic existence, and may be regarded as a symbolic form of rebirth, where the workcamp place allows volunteers to see past experiences in the rearview mirror as unsatisfactory, and pushes them to move forward:

> And my mother said to me one time 'one day you should do something differently, not always your regular life' because I was hanging out at home, I don´t know, sleeping and sitting with computer and not really... yeah, *it was not a real life*. Really something… *living life outside the place* and...yeah, that was important to do something out of your comfort zone

and it was the first out of my comfort zone experience. *It was an out of comfort experience for me*. (J., Germany – Volunteer)

> There was a Polish guy who joined workcamp eleven times, at first he joined as a student during holiday but now he is an IT expert and he said workcamps are his only holiday because it´s *something totally different* from his job and everyone around him is shocked when he tells them he is going on holiday but actually to work…[…] people ask why you don´t go to seaside, to the beach to lay down and do nothing and he said *it´s not fulfilling him*. Because *this is different work, this is physical work*, not working with computers, or to be with people, otherwise it´s just you and computer, you and computer, customer and computer and you and so on so this is *stepping out of your comfort zone*. (J., Slovakia – Volunteer)

In their personal journey volunteers cross comfort lines, modelling solidarity and temporarily transforming with their presence the habits and meaning of the places they invest in. Thus, workcamps can also offer a temporary respite from asylum-related pressures, serving as an environment where individuals experience freedom as a form of affective pedagogy. Participants are afforded relief from administrative identity, facilitating de-labelling, existential reflection, and a process of re-humanisation. These interstitial spaces allow residents to transcend bureaucratic classifications:

It's brave to come and stay in our dormitory, eat the food you're given... It's *a powerful act*. (K., Local partner)

> I find that the workcamp gives them a sense of freedom. Because they're not going to be thinking about their asylum application... Everything has already been done for them... and the conversations often revolve around that too. (C., Belgium – Social Worker)

A productive disruption can occur when being far from home facilitates liberation through anonymity, and self-reflection; the different physical space then serves as a kind of pedagogical

oxygen. Temporary separation from one's home environment – often a contributing cause to the personal insecurity - triggers symbolic movement, making location itself an educational force:

> Here, we are *somewhere else, free from judgement* [gaze]. Barriers evaporate. […] It's a tool, *a rupture, a breath of fresh air* to get them away from Paris, away from their routine... we're counting on the projects to *spark little things, so that they can get down to work* afterwards. (N., France – Social Worker)

> In a mixed group - Japanese, Americans, Mexicans - the 'tough neighbourhood' image doesn't impress everyone. Others don't have those references, so their gaze is different. *That alone already shifts how a young person sees themselves*.' (N., France – Organiser)

Cultivating the volunteers' adaptive intelligence means developing flexibility as a core skill, and building relational understanding through physical and emotional adjustments. Adaptation, resilience, and self-organisation become central themes, turning improvisation into an essential competency for life:

> Frankly, *adapting to the environment you're in and the people you're with*. Making do with what you have. (V., France – Volunteer)

> We just improvised. J. asked someone to put her card in, and they gave her the money... *Just improvising*. [...] We did all that for a good cause. Because if we'd done all that only to end up in the forest... I would have cried. But this was good. It's a pleasant kind of tiredness because we were doing something, and there was even a beautiful view and everything. (V., France – Volunteer)

Retrospectively, hardship becomes a sign of purpose and adversity validates experience. Work is reframed as joyful, embodied learning; places shape how we learn. Physical labour turns into pleasure, with the 'pleasant kind of tiredness' reflecting positive change that happened through effort.

Conflict as pedagogy

Within this difficult passage, conflict is not treated as a failure but as friction that teaches. Leaders intentionally hold a 'little bit' of tension to make divergences visible and workable, recoding conflict from social pathology to pedagogy. Camps become laboratories of coexistence: production can be paused for a circle, transparency is preferred to rumour, and humour or routine stimulates conflict competence. Regulation is mostly the target: the aim is not to eliminate disagreement, but to learn how to deal with differences without reproducing exclusionary logics.

Conflict positions tension as a form of pedagogical friction, viewing encounters with difference as integral to moral and social development. This approach reframes conflict as a laboratory for coexistence, emphasizing the process of achieving equilibrium in learning rather than simply seeking resolution:

> It's not that I want conflict to happen, but a little bit yes… You know, like *that level of conflict where people realise that there are differences, that there are things to take into account* that they don't usually take into account. (L., France – Camp leader)
>
> I don't like conflicts, but maybe […] I used to see a lot of conflicts in my family, so for me, conflict was really negative. I'm starting to change my mind - it's not necessarily negative. (J., Lithuania – Organiser)
>
> My colleagues were learning this… how to *save the lunch without conflicts*. Volunteers start cooking and you see it will be ready at half past two and it will not be enough…so you join them, with a suggestion: hey, what about adding this? And somehow it works. We considered it as a something special at the beginning… but now I saw that it turned into a something totally normal - when some of us came to the kitchen and checked it - *to take care not to provoke any trauma*… (D., France – Camp leader)
>
> From the beginning it was about conflict. We wanted to do something there because there was conflict, because it was a place where they [young people in the neighbourhood] hang out, they fight, it is *a place of insecurity*, so it creates a

> perimeter of emptiness around, all those problems… it creates a centre of sh*t in the heart of the neighbourhood […] But in my point of view, *the international workcamp participates as well to the regulation , not to the point of solving the conflicts, but regulating them*. (E., France – City counsellor)

Establishing collaborative circles helps address obstacles while reinforcing the right to individual choice. When viewed as a pedagogical tool, conflict promotes leadership mediation through containment and autonomy, offers threshold experiences, and facilitates transformative learning:

> When a group wasn't motivated, I stopped the site and held a circle: *everyone says where they are. It loosened things. I remind them: if this task isn't your thing*, try kitchen/processing/another site - *but participation is expected*. It's not a holiday camp; if you truly want to do nothing, Club Med is elsewhere. Some arrive without being told where they were coming - that's not okay; *we reset expectations*. (J., France – Leader)

Potential conflict also involves addressing gender dynamics as an area for pedagogical resistance and viewing leadership as a form of deliberate assertion with an emphasis on parity. Leadership mediation encompasses the ethics of equality and cross-cultural negotiation, positioning leadership as a performative pedagogy that is facilitated through self-assertion:

> They said girls shouldn't carry heavy wood; we insisted. *The argument about who should carry pillars taught respect*. (S., Cambodia - Local leader)

> Because I am a woman leader, it's more difficult in this type of space because I was working with Muslim guys. So you can imagine… I always have to say I am in the same level as them. […] In the first meeting the boys said, 'What the girls will do in this? It's too difficult.'… So I said, 'I can do it. Don't let them take your job.'… *They learned that the girls can do even better*. (C., Peru – Camp leader)

Experiential learning is emphasised also in view of conflicts, with peer motivation playing a significant role. Inclusion is promoted through adaptive learning strategies and peer-led

pedagogy, where physical labour becomes a way to engage everyone by reallocating tasks based on diverse abilities. Social pressure transforms into a constructive teaching method, as collective norms encourage active participation. Regulation happens transparently on-site, ensuring safety through openness, which also helps resolve conflicts. Experiences that challenge boundaries serve as valuable lessons, with distinctions between technique, group dynamics, and individual perspectives remaining fluid throughout:

> The first day is just to see how the people work… some people have little problems of concentration, so we give them other tasks… But for others, *when most of the group works, they also drive the ones who don't want to work*. So it was very cool. (C., Peru – Leader)

> When there is conflict, *we replicate society's process: we exclude. That is where we can learn something*. If there's a conflict on the site, we stop and talk-cordiality, accepting difference, non-violent communication. No secrets: I can't 'keep something' from the team. Transparency is safer and wiser. (J., France – Leader)

Reflexivity, reframing and empathy

Reflective practices consolidate these shifts. Perspective-taking narratives (from 'they are selfish' to 'they are strong-minded; I can be generous') show cognitive and moral reframing. Problem solving under uncertainty builds durable self-efficacy. A distinctive emotional economy anchors closure: volunteers in tears in front of the wall they built, the shock of departure, and 'stars in the eyes' operate as communal rites of passage that publicly mark the crossing from effort to recognition. Such affect is not incidental sentiment; it is the social proof of learning and the moment where agency becomes legible to self and others. Cross-narrative encounters also challenge national history and encourage plural perspectives by disrupting traditional knowledge and social norms:

> I was experiencing new people and cultures, and about history, for example how I was learning history in school, and then I met people from Latvia, like, so, *my whole world turned*

around let's say, because *the history in each country is their own history of the world*. So my image of the world changed because when you put a lot of information together, and it's coming together, you see the truth is somewhere in the middle. (K., Hungary – Organiser)

> For sure it opened my eyes in terms of some countries or cultures, you can realize many facts about the countries concerning ordinary life, for example, education system, insurance system and so on, and it also helps to realize to be glad for what we have here that it´s not natural to study for free that it can be pretty expensive. Or that you don't have to work while studying, or that you don't worry about insurance, respectively, if you have health insurance you don't have to worry that you wouldn't be treated in case, there are some things you normally don't think about but when you compare it to other contexts in other countries, that it can be different. That the system we have is in fact very good, so I start value what we have here. (V., Czech Republic – Leader)

Reflection and reframing prompted by discomfort, shifts in perspective, cognitive openness, and empathic reframing all help to internalise a sense of otherness through ongoing engagement. This process showcases how intersubjective growth leads to learning generosity by embracing diversity:

> At first…*why are they so selfish, I thought* but later one week passed and I understand them and this is their personality, *I understand them*. Yeah, I think this is the big difference. […] But, yeah, my values don´t fit with them but I understand them so now… I think it will be okay, it´s okay […] Like me, some people change their mind because they know the personality of the countries and, yeah… also they can be generous. (M., Japan – Volunteer)

Recognising discomfort as a catalyst for learning helps transform uncertainty into effective problem-solving skills. By using humour and establishing routines, tension can be reduced, eventually making conflict competence a natural, ingrained habit:

> It´s about leaving your comfort zone and that´s cool, to experience something new, not to live only in everyday stereotypes…and mainly to help somewhere where it's really needed, not to

> have everything only [planned] but *also to solve problems*. It's probably this, new experiences, problem solving, *how to solve them or to help solving them, this is the way it's enriching*. (J., Slovakia – Volunteer)

Reflexive evaluation, an essential step into the self-recognition of learning by the participants, involves structured self-assessment, which formalises reflective practice. Learning outcomes are confirmed through dialogue. Reflective tools, participatory evaluation, and transformation measurement all contribute to making change evident for participants. In this process, learning is collaboratively negotiated rather than unilaterally imposed:

> Before you leave, I ask you to fill out this form, and when you come back, we ask you the same questions... *we discuss why there is a difference and what caused the difference*. (E., France – Organiser)

Motivation can be viewed as an emergent process, evolving from imposed participation to self-agency, with will-formation identified as a key pedagogical objective. Empowerment is achieved through experiential learning, emphasizing personal development as an ongoing process rather than a fixed state. The paradox inherent in volunteering among those who have not yet embraced voluntarism illustrates the transformative nature of this dynamic, especially for youth joining from a disadvantaged background:

> Contact with young people... is to *check that they are driving the process*, or even if they are not, because working with young people who are already driving the process would mean working with young people who are already volunteers, when *the aim of the project is to turn them into volunteers*. (E., France – Organiser)

Organisers themselves also encounter thresholds, as leadership often involves continual recalibration. Leader reflexivity and the ability to learn from miscalibration are essential components, and key considerations include leadership reflexivity, on-the-job craft and skill acquisition, and alignment with programme design:

Sometimes I planned two weeks for a task and after two weeks we're only halfway, because no one actually knew how to pickaxe properly, and I wasn't beside them at each moment. *You learn to recalibrate, technique, pacing, team breakdowns.* Thresholds exist for leaders too. (N., France – Organiser)

An important aspect of self-reflection is ethical communication, developing moral competence by thoughtfully negotiating language and tone. It treats local and international cultural differences as valuable resources, transforms perceived barriers into assets, and views disabilities as a means of collective learning through relational pedagogy. With transformative reframing, diversity becomes a tool for learning, and creativity guides inclusion efforts. This approach turns special needs into opportunities for shared growth, establishing a pedagogy rooted in embracing difference.

We see *barriers as positive for the group*… Imagine a sign-language volunteer in a children's camp - they could learn together and do theatre for parents. (T., Greece – Organiser)

Learn to communicate, get on well with other people, other nationalities or cultures and just mainly to communicate in sense *to explain something to be understandable and in a non-offensive way*, not to insult, *not to hurt anybody* because this can be difficult nowadays. (J., Slovakia – Volunteer)

Learning how to step back and be respectful in the way we can engage with people in the village and *understand their views*, ultimately making us aware of how important it was for them to be able to preserve, with their built heritage, the peaceful way of life that constitutes a crucial element of the site's history, culture and value. (H., Korea – Campleader)

One thing that they certainly improve by the end of the camp is their communication skills, by that I mean also *understanding and adapting to the culture and the way of thinking*. But for most of them who are students, *what is exceptional is the very fact*

of using their hands, going on the ground and working on a field project of this nature. (R., Zimbabwe - Organiser)

Moral reflection and self-examination also occur within host communities, where civic empathy and the observation of altruistic behaviours can prompt ethical introspection. Volunteering may serve as a catalyst for fostering moral engagement among community members:

> Sometimes we have somebody coming and saying: 'You have volunteers here? It is good they are here. All the young ones should do it'. […] I think that many people will start to think...They will think about the meaning. *What does it mean to do something for others*?(G., Czech Republic – Local partner)

Affect and behaviour serve as pedagogical instruments, with friendliness exemplifying embodied education. Emotional modelling and the cultivation of empathy are integral components of this learning process:

> *First is knowledge*. They learn new knowledge. *Second is hands-on creativity*. *Third is friendliness.* The Japanese brothers and sisters [international volunteers], they are very friendly, so the *children learn about being friendly to others*. (E., Indonesia – Organiser)

Praxis-based learning brings together hands-on effort with cultural adjustment also inside the 'village' of a refugee centre, turning discomfort into a beneficial force. A gentle push against routine can refresh established institutional practices:

> These people... bring a freshness... it *challenges our practice: why are you doing this*, why at this time of day? (K., Local partner)

Ultimately, reflexivity is fostered through a pedagogy of responsibility, creating a cycle of reciprocal learning. Reciprocity is evident as volunteers gain knowledge by teaching others. This approach incorporates preparation, reflective practice, and experiential learning through the process of transmission:

When volunteers prepare the day for children, *they learn the most*. They need to know what they're going to do: this preparation creates awareness. (N., Iran – Organiser)

With volunteers, communities, social workers and local partners all bringing in different perspectives, expectation shock leads to emotional adjustment and a service ethic rooted in realism. Intercultural role-reversal and misplaced expectations cause social friction, teaching both sides through reversed pedagogy. Volunteers' initial self-perceptions highlight power dynamics in volunteering, and it is up to the educators to shift from caretaker to facilitator, promoting mutual learning and reflexivity, with the social worker also undergoing personal and professional transformation:

For the girls, it was their first time [volunteering]... they expected grateful children, but *that wasn't the case at all*. (M., France – Social Worker)

I'm changing the way I act: rather than doing things for them, I'm getting them as involved as possible... *It has changed my perspective too*. (N., France – Social Worker)

Affective repair

Finally, the chapter situates individual transformation within structural horizons. Workcamps offer a liminal counter-space - 'freedom from the gaze' - for asylum seekers and marginalized youth to exist beyond administrative labels, even as they confront racism, bureaucratic hurdles, or institutional mistrust. Mobility anxieties are converted into navigational competence; parental witnessing and community recognition anchor change; and small, embodied successes (cooking for many, finishing a wall, taking a train) accumulate into revalued selves. In sum, *discomfort* names a carefully mediated ecology of rupture and repair in which pain signals the threshold, care provides the bridge, and collective practice sustains the crossing. This sets up the transition for the dynamics that will appear in the later chapters on place-based pedagogy and work as a relation.

Trust fosters empowerment and guidance. When responsibility is internalised through directed trust, individuals become capable through shared belief. Leadership involves mediation between trust and accountability, while self-efficacy is especially significant for disadvantaged youth. Conflict can serve as a teaching tool, facilitating transformative learning:

> We give space, trust, and responsibility: 'If you break it, you'll repair it. I believe you can, and if needed, I'll go with you step by step.' *Responsibility becomes a capability* when it's held in trust. (N., France – Organiser)

Providing gentle guidance and adapting to individual needs allows for a balance between independence and support, turning discomfort into a rhythm of trust. Motivation is encouraged without coercion. This includes leadership through mediation (emphasising both care and choice), offering gentle entry points to new experiences, fostering transformative learning, and prioritising inclusion and equity:

> Pushing or pulling doesn't work. I adapt to their rhythm, re-explain; if it really doesn't take, I suggest other live tasks (kitchen, garden, wood). If pressure rises, I say: *stay with us, watch, and jump in when you feel like it*. *We never do 'make-busy'; there's always a real reason*. The people are central; our job is to care so they're comfortable and *find pleasure and meaning*. (J., France – Leader)

Responsibility is demonstrated through processes of engagement and repair. Experiencing discomfort is reframed as an ethical practice, while repair serves as a pedagogical approach to fostering accountability. Emphasis is placed on construction rather than destruction, and the development of self-efficacy, promoting transformative learning and conscientization:

> The project works because *they are allowed to do*. If you break a window, okay - you'll change it, and I'll show you how. *You'll learn to fix what you broke*. That's not criminalization; that's responsibility and capability. *Construction replaces destruction, and dignity returns*. (N., France – Organiser)

So that's what I think as well, the international workcamp can also set free some things in those young people and more specifically *makes them realize that: yes me too I am able to do it*, if there are some young people who come from very far away, in my neighbourhood, to participate, to bring life to the neighbourhood, and create activities... *I can do that too. Maybe my future is not blocked. And me too I would like to put things in action*. (G., Belgium – Organiser)

My young volunteer, who arrived looking completely miserable, completely stoned, who couldn't wake up in the morning... he was fed up with being there, with all the misery in the world, with all his aggressiveness, with his very, very heavy past, with all the injections that made him completely lethargic, that made him sleep all the time, and then there was this self-exclusion, this shyness, this withdrawal, and then he complained because he 'doesn't like doing walls, he doesn't like doing building sites', he didn't want to be there, etc. And then to return with the same guy, confident, head held high, smiling, making jokes, saying goodbye to everyone *with tears in his eyes* and collecting everyone's contact details, asking for news, saying that he loved working on the wall, and that *he opened up to everything! To the world, to others, to work, to what we did*. That's it. It's brilliant! (L., France – Organiser)

Tears signal the point where effort is acknowledged and emotional agency is validated. This affective release at the wall represents a threshold of transformation: joy emerges as identity forms through labour. Emotional thresholds, such as forming new bonds or facing separation, reveal the depth of relational change:

I saw him *come back here with stars in his eyes*... as if it were completely magical. (M., Belgium – Local partner)

Why does everyone cry at the end of workcamps? *Every time, there is someone who cries*. (C., Belgium – Social Worker)

They *cried when saying goodbye*; we became a family. (S., Cambodia – Local partner)

> However, for me, any people regardless of class, nationality, or whatever, *when people who worked with me leave*, I feel very sad and sorry. (K., Korea – Local partner)
>
> We had a ceremony in the Town Hall, they had diplomas for us, and they said thank you...I spoke also with the Mayor, it was a very good experience, good for them and good for us too. So they recognized us for the work at the ceremony [...], but when we finished [the work] we were just the group, we were just the group for sharing that moment. [...] But I think the most important is when you recognize what you did. I remember when we finished the first work that we did, the circle wall, *I started to cry*, I mean not cry...*Because you have a good feeling, a really good feeling that you have done something, and you are like, capable of making that*. I think that everybody felt that at the end. (C., Peru – Camp leader)

By reframing discomfort as a designed and supported passage rather than an unintended side-effect, this chapter has highlighted its pedagogical role in enabling transformation. Anxiety, emotional labour, and moments of conflict are not treated as obstacles to learning, but as signals that participants are crossing a threshold from passive coexistence to active engagement. The management of discomfort through collective coping strategies, facilitation, and shared vulnerability emerges as a form of empowerment that allows new relational capacities to develop. However, these affective processes do not unfold in abstraction. They are deeply shaped by the material, social, and symbolic environments in which they occur. The analysis therefore now turns to examining how space, locality, and situated living conditions actively mediate discomfort and support learning through embodied and contextualised experience.

VII.

Place as pedagogy

Embodied, situated, and material learning

Vaunières is a small valley in the Alps, almost outside the world:
no easy contact with the valley, little network.
It's a non-place where young people can be
someone totally different from who they are at home
because they're not in their usual world.
(N., France – Organiser)

Hands-on ecological learning

Place is not a neutral backdrop, but an active pedagogical medium that shapes relations, skills, and ethical attention. Organizers underscore that the camp as a learning landscape only becomes educative through long-horizon reciprocity with hosts and partners; locality is chosen and cultivated so that intensive immersion, not mere visitation, can occur. As sites 'speak', heritage and community function as co-teachers: manual repair, storytelling, and everyday conviviality transform forts, bridges, schools, and shelters into didactic environments where learners encounter history, craft, and civic responsibility. Crucially, routine and rhythm-morning check-ins at coffee time, shared cleanups, and group walks all constitute a temporal architecture of care that stabilizes diversity so learning can deepen.

Reusing public spaces, sharing items or tools across groups, balancing community benefits with organisational control, and the importance of visibility and recognition are all concepts that address spatial reappropriation, the role of boundary objects and shared artifacts, ownership dynamics, and the need for acknowledgment within collaborative environments:

Cities ask for ‘meters of repointing.’ I say *the project is not linear meters; it’s the time people spend together and what remains as a place* - benches, a pétanque space, gravel they raked themselves. *It must show volunteers made it*, not a company. (N., France – Organiser)

Without that, people blow fuses: at ‘café chantier’ [morning meetings] we do notes, open agenda, assign morning missions together, review the week, and *visit sites collectively*. *I supply materials and accompany people* to scope what they’ll need. (J., France – Leader)

We *adapt tasks* to who’s coming. If we have ten- or eleven-year-olds or a IME [facilities for youth with intellectual disabilities] group, no scaffolding or drywall this week: we plan garden work, weeding, light soil prep, planting. In summer, with mixed ages and abilities, *there are so many different sites that everyone can find meaningful work*. (J., France – Leader)

The environment acts as a silent teacher, with structure and rhythm delivering lessons. Deep learning happens by participating and engaging with the space, not just observing:

Most outcomes occur naturally due to *the framework and tools* provided by the workcamp. *Living and working collectively is already the lesson*. The extra twenty percent comes with partners over time: gender mix, who gets the cement mixer, who gets the trowel - *we nudge the habits*. (N., France – Organiser)

They arrive with no bearings; there’s no phone signal; *the rhythms are different*. In three days, you can take a group far because *the frame dislodges the habits*. It’s a gentle utopia: a rupture they actually need. (N., France – Organiser)

This kind of activities go deeper. You can be involved more in this kind of activities. And not just as tourist that you do some *photos of places*, stay in hotel and that’s all. For me this kind of projects and programs are special so that’s why I always try to travel through this project and volunteer because *you feel like very deep with experience*. (R., Spain – Volunteer)

Designed to host, the workcamp spaces continue to act as learning environments beyond the intensive camp experience, creating opportunities for learning outside traditional classrooms. Workcamps become settings for civic education, to the extent of bridging volunteering into the formal education system where students, institutions and parents increasingly acknowledge and support the integration of complementary learning experiences for young people:

> So, these days, schools even get quite interested in the workcamps, so they wanted to let their children participate in the camp. In the past, we had to try hard to get the students participate in the camp, but now the *schools found the value in the workcamp and sent some students to the camp*. (J., Czech Republic – Local partner)

> Gaining *real experience in situ*... I see what professional life in Belgium is like... I am discovering the codes. (RC., Belgium – Local partner)

> For my son, it is *reading skill. Reading and reading. Second is swimming skill. My son couldn't swim before meeting the volunteers*. Swimming is sport, right? It's good for health for my son. Next, he was invited with the other children to visit museums. First time, it was in the Central Java Museum, you know, in Kalibanteng, Semarang. The Ronggowarsito Museum. That area actually is my hometown. So *I know that the museum is full of knowledge needed for my son. I'm happy he joined this activity*. So he could learn history and this supports his study in his school. (J., Indonesia – Local partner)

> Teachers are getting more and more overwhelmed, so I think our work of helping the teachers became more important. *We don't help at doing their classes, but bringing something new, something more non-formal in the schools*. The lower grade teachers told me that they have learnt some interesting activities from the volunteers. I think it's important, so they can help us learn how to do it another way. In Hungary the teaching method is that the teacher stands in front of the class and tells the truth. Now this doesn't work, the children changed a lot, and

the world around us, and sometimes the teachers who started their career earlier can't change their mind, I think. The volunteers can help them, and they can see that a new method can work, and if you see something with your own eyes, they believe it. *When I tell them, try to do something different, they won't do it, but if they can see, I think they are convinced easier* that there are new methods and ways to make our work more successful. I think it's very important. (M., Hungary – Teacher)

> For instance, we organize capacity building and mobilization training *prior to camp*, where we invite youth from other countries in the region *to learn about the management of the project* before participating in it as volunteers. […] Most of them are students of environmental sciences and some are even pursuing their masters' degrees. They clearly share and come for a common goal with us, so I think we are giving them the opportunity – *a very rare opportunity – to also understand the importance of community development and to participate in a hands-on activity* that has the potential to actually save the heritage site. (R., Zimbabwe - Organiser)

Like for the initial access, ensuring that the workcamp's physical and pedagogical space is welcoming requires individualised preparation of leaders to support cognitive accessibility, inclusive practices designed around individual needs, and an ethical commitment to attentive engagement. Implementing concrete micro-adaptations demonstrates respect in action:

> It varies a lot by organisation - time, energy, *how inclusive their camps are*. This year we had more than one inclusion session in the leaders' training because over a third of our participants were 'Access for All' profiles: refugees, migrants, asylum seekers. *The workcamp leader is the one who makes the real job*; without training and mindset, nothing happens. (A., Germany – Organiser)

> It's different when you have a person in the autism spectrum… you need to know this and speak clear, not with second meanings. Some cases are specific and you must be prepared. (T., Greece – Organiser)

Ultimately, with the proper preparation, even spaces that impose experiences of physical and emotional discomfort in a protected environment can lead participants to stepping away from familiar comforts. These spaces can also allow participants to revitalise their energy, while simplicity enables freedom and material instability to be transformed into meaningful, shared solidarity:

> No hot water, inflatable mattresses, they slept outside, they loved it. They said, *'When are we going back?*' (M., France – Social Worker)

Environmental aesthetics and care

The workcamp model also centres place as a liminal threshold. 'Non-places' like remote valleys or asylum centres are depicted as micro-villages where identity can be tried on again and where social scripts loosen. The absence of familiar networks creates room to be 'someone else' and the periphery becomes a reflective mirror that accelerates change. Inclusion is engineered spatially through task design for mixed abilities, mobility that gets people 'out of the centre', and preparatory training that translates abstract policy into site-specific practice. Visual and performative mediations - drawing faces on shop windows, using photos to explain 'what a camp is', staging simulations and local plays - turn the site into a public classroom and make encounters legible across language and status differences.

Intentional locality reflects a learning approach that emphasises direct engagement within local communities: 'I chose to *come in a small village* because I wanted to work with people' (M., Hungary – Teacher). Workcamps foster aesthetic change and raise public awareness. Specifically, beautification turns overlooked spaces into meaningful landmarks that inspire community pride and participation, bridging local and global even beyond political tensions:

The most significant change, like I mentioned earlier, after something came up in the Songjung station area where *it used to have nothing*, *people came from other regions to see and take pictures, it was the most rewarding part for me*. It was also because the paintings were quite different from the other paintings in a sense that the quality was better and in a sense that *it was done by people from abroad*, too. All the works from the university student volunteers to the campers, everything was rewarding. (K., Korea – Local partner)

The projects have also helped us build new partnerships and innovative ways to attract youth. We *made a local festival into an international one*, valorising the musicians from the community, who *in turn helped us by carrying our message* and writing songs about heritage that help us in schools. (E., Uganda - Organiser)

We want them to understand that not every youth and non-governmental organisation are running activities for political reasons, *but for community development*. (R., Zimbabwe - Organiser)

Caring for the workcamp environment involves integrating principles of environmental aesthetics and eco-pedagogy. Environmental awareness is combined with creative initiative, transforming ecological stewardship into a form of aesthetic expression. This approach also emphasises civic environmentalism, positioning volunteers and youth as intermediaries. Through environmental education facilitated by students and children, moral and ecological values are transmitted across generations:

The volunteers talked to us about recycling, about what it is, and they told us that where they live they put it in containers for specific materials. This *not only helps reuse rubbish but can also be a good way of decorating the city and making it beautiful*. (S., Ecuador – Teacher)

Now I tell my neighbours to separate waste; *it started here* (S., Cambodia – local partner)

For sure, *from the cleanness aspect, there is a change for local people not to throw garbage* into Cikapunding river anymore. (D., Indonesia – Local partner)

> Yes, of course we have improved a lot, also because thanks to this cleaning that you have made, we will be able to start the sanitization in the way that the animals, flea and tick that were characteristic of our community for a long time, can now be eradicated more easily. (M., Italy – Local partner)

Water, soil, mud, stones: an ethic

Working with stones, mud, wood, and water also helps with producing situated knowledge and moral sensibilities: 'beauty' and finish are treated as ethical horizons that shape the self as much as the artifact. Participants describe how collective making reclaims space: cabins, shelters, and terraces convert spectatorship into stewardship. As 'construction replaces destruction', young people discover capability through accountable, active doing. These visible traces - the small wall built at nineteen, the reopened mountain path - anchor belonging and memory. The idea of 'Nature as Other expands teaching to include more than just humans: volunteers learn from natural elements and historic human artefacts and tools, treating them as moral partners. Environmental care is framed as an exchange: conservation connected to livelihoods, sanitation linked to dignity, and aesthetics related to wellbeing – all allowing ecological and cultural responsibility to come together. Youth frequently mediate this shift, carrying new habits home (not littering, revaluing water), while communities reframe former practices (consuming eggs) into protection and reverence, fostering an environment where ecological sustainability and social cohesion are complementary objectives:

> They *learned* about Roman water canals built 3,000 years ago… irrigation and cultivation in terraces…how they transferred the water from one place to another. (A., Palestine – Organiser)

> The local people, the local government, the police department all supported well the volunteers while they built a turtle information centre, nurtured the baby turtles, protected the sea turtles and their eggs. Sea-turtle conservation and environment interlink together.

> The work done by volunteers helped to protect the environment. If fishermen conserve sea-turtles then only it helps to sustain their livelihood, because the presence of turtles helps fishermen to get more fish. So those trainings and awareness programs helped the fishermen to participate in this project and ensure the sustainability of the project. And nowadays the local people don't consume the turtles or the eggs. Now people protect the sea turtles. They realised that *if the volunteers are doing such things, why couldn't we also follow the same path ourselves*? (R., India – Fisherman)

> Twice a year we organize a big cleaning; everyone understands the advantages of the mangroves. A mangrove tree can rescue a fisherman's life; it supports biodiversity and gives us *lessons on patience*. (S., Cambodia – Local partner)

> The *mud taught us teamwork*, it doesn't let you rush (L., Cambodia – Local partner)

> The *tide decided when* we worked (S., Cambodia – local partner)

> The problem with the forest is that *although it is a sacred site*, *locals also need to use the wood for their livelihoods*, and it is therefore imperative to plant more trees. Volunteers collected the different seeds, *those that they had learned to recognize from the local community* and planted them at the tree nursery at the tourist centre. (J., France – Photographer)

> After the volunteers left, *we kept planting* (S., Cambodia – Local partner)

> Water is our jewellery… volunteers *learned* how mismanagement of water can damage everything… *they appreciated their water more* after the camp. (N., Iran – Organiser)

Exploring both tangible and intangible systems, this approach emphasises developing an understanding of traditional and modern knowledge about nature. Water is presented as a heritage system, while nature serves as a restorative pedagogue. It offers therapeutic benefits and opportunities for emotional re-calibration, synching the time of the volunteer group and its interaction with the community.

Heritage as identity practice, re-appropriation of spaces

Heritage and community are positioned as co-educators, with heritage conservation viewed as an identity practice. Storytelling, simulation, and play function as integral components of place-based pedagogy. The concept of reclaiming play as part of reclaiming place is emphasized, while learning through joyful physical engagement and spontaneity is explored:

> For example, when I go on an excursion with kids, they go through adventures, *things they don't usually do, like rolling down the hill*…People don't do these things anymore. I go, lie down, and roll down the hillside screaming (laughs). So *I try to give these kids experiences that they don't normally go through. It doesn't cost money, but it's a huge experience and learning opportunity*. I want the youth-clubs to understand the value of these experiences. Children can build from their experiences, this is how they can learn and build a healthy society. (I., Hungary – Local partner)

> We have worked here for 20 years, it's never ending. Which allowed us - I am talking about the renovation of the built heritage - to build a project around this site, and *little by little reconquering these spaces that had been abandoned and unclaimed for decades*. And we're writing a new history for this Fort, around culture and tourism: it *becomes a place of permanent and temporary exhibitions, theatre, concerts…a space welcoming the public*, meeting rooms and seminars. So step by step, the actions we implement on this site liberate year after year new spaces, public spaces that we could valorise thanks to the actions of the organisation, and like this we keep advancing. The most significant change? It contributes to opening the Fort site. I am telling you, ten years ago there were maybe 2000 visitors, this year there have been 10,000. Sure, it is not only the workcamps, but workcamps participate in this…Workcamps inscribe themselves in the project of the Fort. (L., France – Mayor)

> Our main goal is not only to do the work itself but also the human dimension. *We're not gonna clean a mute place - this place has to talk.* You have to understand its

language through the people, what it means to them, how long they've known it. Convert the place from being mute to outspoken. (A., Palestine – Organiser)

It is thanks to our work and relationship with the community that *we were invited to their most intimate spaces, to private rooms with symbolic meanings* where few outsiders are actually ever allowed, and where the cultural values that constitute an important part of this heritage are preserved and transmitted every day. (H., Korea – Campleader)

The presence of local and national volunteers is something that really *changed the way people talked about heritage in the project, because it's their heritage. They own it and they want to transmit it*, to talk about it to the other volunteers and the tourists. (E., Uganda - Organiser)

For people whose everyday environment counts among the sources of distress, the 'change of air' of workcamps becomes a positive force, whether it is the individual entering a new geographical space or the workcamp itself transforming for a short period of time the function and meaning of a site. On one side, nature and a slower pace encourage reflection and grounding while rural tranquillity acts as a healing environment. On the other side, investing in the difficult spaces of the periphery – difficult neighbourhoods, asylum centres – provides a mirror to both volunteers and local inhabitants for both personal and societal contemplation. The workcamp house is seen as an open, inviting space, facilitating transitions and learning and encouraging participants to break out of isolation – sometimes paradoxically by investing in isolated sites:

They were much further inland... the Parisians *enjoyed this exile*. The calm did not bother them. (N., France – Social Worker)

Solidarités Jeunesses is made of houses. It focuses on what happens inside, but *openness to the outside world is essential*... otherwise we become trapped in our own ways of doing things. (E., France – Organiser)

> The community consists mainly of asylum seekers and people in precarious situations... It's a small village. It was appreciated... to have the volunteering project and something very concrete... they are people that need *to see other people, to get out of the centre*. (RC., Belgium - Local partner)

> Living in a shelter, twenty-four hours a day... without being able to breathe anywhere else... [the workcamp] it's *a breath of fresh air*. (D., Belgium – Local partner)

> Off-site projects and in situ projects are complementary... how do these two approaches feed into each other? [...] Centres are often isolated...*getting out of the centre and doing something* is enough to get things moving. (G., Belgium – Organiser)

Tangible legacy and place-memory

Finally, the data reveal the importance of visibility and recognition that runs through a renewed relationship with the hosting place as the site of meaningful work. In this sense, place-based pedagogy does not culminate in a single outcome. In fact, it is an ongoing social choreography -structured, affective, material - through which encounters, work, and ecology co-produce transformed subjects and spaces. Reappropriation and revalorisation go hand in hand, with the tangible traces of volunteering being perceivable in the long term thanks to local stewardship as a measure of lasting transformation:

> People are thankful to us that we have saved and reconstructed the parish. During the workcamp we do a 'West Bohemian Castles Trip' and we take volunteers not around the most famous places but around *the forgotten ones which are unique*. But you got it when you see foreigners being impressed. (L., Czech Republic – Local partner)

> The project also *changed the way the local people perceive their own community*. Many people now love the village more! (G., Italy – Deputy Mayor)

From the volunteers´ point of view that they go somewhere else and they get familiar with the culture in different way than to come here as just tourists. *Main thing of volunteering is to help build something new somewhere, to leave their trace. Leaving trace is probably the main point of volunteering*, to help with something which wouldn´t be built or built easily otherwise. (J., Slovakia – Volunteer)

> But it wouldn't have had the same effect at all [without the workcamp]. We wouldn't have had that sense of reappropriation of the environment. We wouldn't have worked with the same value criteria. Even now, people still come up to us and say, 'Well, we use your shelter a lot.' For example, in Verdenne, *where we built one of the first shelters and where we often go, we can see that the villagers maintain it*. They collect rubbish. They clear the brush and make sure nothing falls apart. So we're very, very happy. [...] But, well, some of them, like this covered playground, are entirely entrusted to the village committee, which will be responsible for maintaining, developing and improving it as it sees fit... but we will no longer be involved. […] So they are delighted, and now they are totally invested in the project. And if they want to develop it, well, they'll develop it. (L., Belgium – Local partner)
>
> > Because we are now on our 17th – well, 18th shelter, even if this one is a covered courtyard, but it's still a shelter – which is used by... At first, it was tourists – families, walkers, mountain bikers, cyclists and the like – who were into green tourism and could use them to take a break. But now, *more and more, we're seeing local communities using them*, which is great. We're delighted. We try to build them in places that are accessible to people with reduced mobility, obviously in an interesting environmental setting, and now we see that people are organising barbecues, fishing trips, birthday parties and family gatherings... even people from outside the community, including Dutch people, who meet up at our shelters. For me, it's a complete success. (L., Belgium – Local partner)

> People talk more about the Périé bridge. People are curious about this project functioning, they ask more questions, *they were positively surprised by all the work achieved by those 'unskilled' international young volunteers. Some people never came during any project but then come to see me and say that they have been to the bridge*. Those people act as if they are not interested, but still they go visit, and they are positively surprised. Contrary to what we thought at the beginning… *it made them discover a bridge they did not know the existence before*. (C., France – Local partner)
>
> We don't judge them on their technical skills; *we judge them on their commitment*... it's the psychosocial aspect that counts. (R., Belgium – Local partner)

The idea of unskilled youth, disadvantaged volunteers, foreigners and strangers, local communities all working together to modify and reappropriate space through their manual work and collective cooperation introduces the importance of work itself as a catalyst of relation:

> A lot of young *people live in spaces already made for them*: lawns mowed by the city, trees pruned by services, concrete poured by companies. *When they want to act on matter, they carve a name on a bench or a tree - it's still a need to appropriate space*. *Here, we give them the chance to build* the giant cabin: a whole village made by volunteers and local youths, even those who have to be shown which way to hold a screwdriver. And at the end: six buildings, a hall, lots of beds - *they made that*. (N., France – Organiser)

Learning in International Workcamps is in fact inseparable from the physical spaces where it takes place. Far from functioning as a neutral backdrop, the physical and social environments of workcamps actively shape relations, meanings, and possibilities for transformation. Through shared living spaces, local embedding, and sustained presence

within communities, place becomes a pedagogical agent that intensifies encounter and anchors discomfort in everyday practice. Participants learn not only about difference, but through inhabiting spaces marked by histories, inequalities, and collective memory. Yet place alone does not generate relational change. It is through purposeful activity within these settings that difference is further negotiated and reconfigured. The following chapter therefore examines work as the principal source of relation, exploring how shared manual labour functions as a central mediating practice through which solidarity, responsibility, and mutual recognition are enacted.

VIII.

Work as relation

Collective action, purpose, and meaning

Groups vary; sometimes we finish early, sometimes later.
But the presented goal must be achieved –
finishing matters for meaning.
(N., France – Organiser)

Work as 'œuvre': meaningful, finished, visible

Work becomes relation when tasks are teleologically framed and completed together. Participants repeatedly ask for the 'why' of a task, and when purpose is named, labour is re-enchanted as an *œuvre* rather than mere productivity. Tangible finishes (a wall, a fence, a mural) crystallise efficacy, pride, tears; legacy and visibility anchor identity for both volunteers and hosts. In this sense, the manual is moral: creating with one's hands leaves an existential 'trace', and the completed artefact mirrors the group back to itself as capable, useful, and connected to a place:

> Before starting the work, I want to know the purpose of this work […] *The purpose is our motivation. So I want to know the purpose of everything we do*. So I give you an example, the last Friday we went to the forest to cut trees and remove the bushes, and we made a path but I didn´t know what…*I didn´t know the reason why we have to do it* so I wanna know the purpose of it. Yeah, I think it´s the bad side of this workcamp but anything else is okay. I just want to know the purpose of the work. *If I become a leader, a campleader, after… I am sure that I will say the purpose before the work*, in the morning I gather everyone and today we will do this, something like that. So let´s do together or…yeah. So, I will gather them and say them the purpose. (M., Japan – Volunteer)

> The task comes probably from the mayor have some project and we help with this project. So probably this people are demanding this path, but sometimes also *I feel that maybe it's better for me to understand for what reason we are doing this or this. Kind of having an aim in the end* because the work is different from date to date and you don't know exactly what you gonna do. (A., Russia – Volunteer)

> Work shouldn't be just endured for money: if you take hold of it and fill it with meaning, it stops being 'labour' and becomes an 'œuvre'. You still have constraints and daily discipline, but *if you can express yourself through the praxis, what you create also creates you*. Accompanying young people and cutting a stone meet in the same place for me. You try to do both as well as possible. That's where self-realization appears: *through work done well, where you carry your values and the best of yourself into what you produce*. That's the ethic I bring to Solidarités Jeunesses. (N., France – Organiser)

From doing for to doing with

Collaboration across difference is learned in the grain of co-production. Teams discover that the final result is 'always better' than solo work; intercultural sessions, co-designed activities, and shared kitchens function as moral rehearsals of equality. Visible labour catalyses spontaneous local imitation - residents join painting, students replicate murals, neighbours contribute refreshments. This 'doing-with' diffuses as a local norm. Cooking, especially, appears as everyday co-labour that re-humanises production and anchors convivial recognition across languages and statuses.

Ethically, this articulates a shift from 'doing for' to 'doing with': gift-economy motivations coexist with high standards of craft, gendered capability is proven in practice, and frustration is reframed as a pedagogy of trust and delegation. The camp is thus a laboratory where praxis precedes discourse: people become different through making together. In that passage, manual

work fuses creation and care, turning collective labour into a shared moral language through which inclusion, responsibility, and democratic belonging are learned by hand:

> I wanted to *do something actively for the community*. I was feeling that I was searching for new inspirations, I was looking for new things. (K., Hungary – Organiser)
>
> I like to help other people and *I don´t care it´s hard or easy I just… I am very glad to help other people, and they say thank you and I´m really happy* so this is a motivation for me and yeah. Volunteering is… I don´t know how to say it but… hm… yeah. I wanna say helping people is…makes me very happy. (M., Japan – Volunteer)
>
> And *the most important and basically the most visible and most productive thing was the work itself, that it is done*. The fence of the cemetery is painted, and the wall of the shop is painted. Actually, this was the main goal, to do some work. (F., Hungary – Local partner)
>
> I think volunteers should understand that it's their responsibility to take an active part in the project, the project only creates the framework, but they have to be active. (K., Hungary – Organiser)
>
> The technical result has been that we've been more productive over the last two years, the quality of the produce is better, the yield is higher. *But the most significant change is the cultural aspect that has been brought to the organisation. It has contributed more diversity and made our work more interesting*. As I said, it brings us together, but I think it also makes us realise that when people come in from the outside they appreciate how much of a community we have here, it makes us think about how important having the organic farm is, and…*it makes us realise that we are something special and a bit unique, that we do something together which is special* and hopefully by sharing this we can make it something that other people might do, and take away and get involved in their own communities. (G., Wales - Farmer)

> We talk about this in the beginning. *You come here to work*. This is not a summer camp; it's a work camp. So if everybody works, everybody is going well. (C., Peru – Leader)

> This is something you do without money, something that brings people help around the world, *something you do for yourself because when you do something without money you should have deep motivation* inside and not just the money. (A., Russia – Volunteer)

Working together across various backgrounds also challenges the myth of individual efficiency, turning labour into a form of relational learning. Intercultural collaboration leads to the joint creation of activities, which serves as a shared process of moral development, where learning happens through collective productivity:

> For me something very clear, *before the project I always preferred to work by myself. If there is something to be done, I always preferred to do everything by myself*. I didn't use to prefer teamwork, for many reasons – I was thinking someone will not like the way I work, or will complain all the time, or will be late, but during the project I learnt how to work in a team. And then I realize it's not a bad team, even if there is someone who is always complaining or is always late or I don't know try to create trouble...Despite all the negative things, *the final work is really – I was thinking it will be not as good – but the final result is really always better than the work that only one person could do*. (R., Hungary – Local volunteer)

> Thanks to many practical activities, team building, different experiences from other people, it all came together, the small practical knowledge and skills. We had to work together. It was not just for fun. We planned sessions, created new games, explained stories from our countries. *If it was not a workcamp, I would not have the chance to hear these stories and never experience seeing the way foreign people work, their attitudes, approaches, their ethics*. (R., Hungary – Local volunteer)

Collaborative contagion and spontaneous participation are observed when volunteer labour serves as a prosocial model, encouraging imitation. This process highlights the diffusion of engagement through visible and easily accessible collective actions:

> So, in the first camp, there was barely attention from the villagers, and they only thought that some foreigners came to visit the beach. However, in the last year, since they came to know about the [volunteers], some people, like the elderly, dropped by with some ice-cream and cool drinks. So, the local residents came to pay much attention to the camp and the volunteers. *Before, the general perception was that foreigners tend to be individual or think of themselves first […] But when the volunteers were painting the walls, the villagers were asking like, 'Oh, can we try, can we help too?'* Although it could be a very short moment, they tried to do it together. (H., Korea – Local partner)

> There were youngsters from our side, the ones who worked with us and some who were involved from other villages around. *And then some who were totally not in connection with us, but they came because there is a voluntary project*. Some kids, the youngsters, are not so spontaneous if it's about volunteering [laugh], *they were just around and popped by, but they were not necessarily volunteers, they were around. […] Then they helped, then they started to paint themselves*. (F., Hungary – Local partner)

> [The workcamp] has created a great impact in the local community, people are really aware about what they need to do. Waste warriors and volunteers together have created an excellent impact to our local community. Local people also had a chance to learn from the volunteers. What should we do for our own community, and *they also realized that if the volunteers are doing such things, why we couldn't also follow the same*. (S., India – Local partner)

> [Korean] university students saw the paintings by the campers and the Korean volunteers; *they asked us if they can paint the opposite side too*. So they painted it with lots of small fish. (K., Korea – Local partner)

> It's a peculiar project that ultimately came about more from the ground up... The residents are in the presence of volunteers; *they also want to give their time. 'Is this possible, and how can we do it'*? (RC., Belgium – Local partner)

In the collective settings of workcamps, manual work is not the only labour shared: cooking together also plays a pivotal role in bridging people to smaller group tasks. Cooking and eating together becomes the site of intercultural negotiation - a performative act of recognition. Food functions as a medium of equality and repair, and stimulates informal sharing and understanding:

> The residents invited us to eat... They laid out a beautiful rug on the floor... everything was colourful... It was a wonderful moment of sharing. (C., Belgium – Social Worker)

> We always mix the local people with the international volunteers… *they have a time of the day to cook for us after the work, and we come back all together to share*. It was very, very cool. (C., Peru – Camp leader)

> Accommodation, food... the fact that we were able to prepare this with the young person and the liaison person made the departure go more smoothly. With the budget we have, we can only give what we have... they eat with us, with the residents... but they seem beyond such concerns. They were cooking African food... they were active and appreciated. Here, I am appreciated, I am active. (G., Belgium – Organiser)

> They were living in the centre of the town, mingling and interacting with people all the time… *families would bring food and tea… It encouraged the community to do some work*… when they see internationals cleaning an ancient place that belongs to them. (A., Palestine – Organiser)

> We have these international meals, about any volunteers share one plate from their country because of course the volunteers from the local [community], not everybody was French, we worked with these teenagers, adolescents, who...they are from another association about the migration and this...so it was really, really

> a mixed group, a lot of countries and yeah I think it was very cool because I can see that, I think nobody was really, really French... (C., Peru – Camp leader)

Participation arises from close community ties and voluntary involvement. Inclusion starts from the ground up through grassroots action, self-empowerment, and acknowledgment of individual agency:

> International Workcamps can also set free some things in those young people and more specifically make them realise that 'yes me too I am able to do it, if there are some young people who come from very far away, in my neighbourhood, to participate, to bring life to the neighbourhood, and create activities... *I can do that too. Maybe my future is not locked*. And me too, I would like to put things in action.' (E., France – City counsellor)

Scaffolding and accompaniment

Inclusion emerges not as a parallel track but through contribution. Across 'Access for All' narratives, participation is scaffolded by triadic partnerships (social worker–young person–host organisation), practical accompaniment (logistics, confidence-building), and leader training that embeds inclusion in everyday decisions. Tools (intake forms, shared frameworks) demystify 'social inclusion', but the decisive site remains the camp's work organisation, where responsibility is co-authored and agency is practised rather than preached. Here, volunteering becomes a hinge between welfare institutions and civic life, turning 'beneficiaries' into co-producers of the common:

> *You have to reach out to them, you have to build it, you have to talk to them personally*, it's not enough to send them an e-mail and invite them. *You have to go and talk*. I'm not saying that the people we build the long-term relationship were not special, because they are all very dedicated and smart, but they were just regular kids, and it could happen with anyone. We would just need more energy. Right now we have one person living there from the staff. Previously *there was someone local who worked for us, who was also young, and it's*

different when you are part of the local community, you are really a youngster, you know how to reach out to young people. So with her, we had a lot of projects where we involved other local youngsters. (V., Hungary – Organiser)

I stay for the half hour it takes to make sure they leave and have everything they need... I want to make sure everything is ok. (D., Belgium – Local partner)

It works on the basis of three parties: the social worker, the young person and the hosting organisation that will be the point of reference for the young person's stay. (E., France – Organiser)

What I tell young people before they leave is 'you are going to help people who are also in need'. And generally, that resonates with their own experiences. (N., France – Social Worker)

Institutional linkages and the (restorative) commons

Workcamps thus need to operate as infrastructural commons and nodal connectors. Links with schools, NGOs, municipalities, and heritage authorities convert marginal efforts into public legitimacy; mayors' visits, media coverage, and institutional requests retro-validate the work as collective good. Material outputs (cleaned sites, built shelters, restored paths, even a school) fold back into community pride and use, while the project's presence strengthens relational networks that outlive the camp. The unit of change is not simply the individual volunteer but the ecology of cooperation the work activates:

Back to the community it's a bit difficult to measure, but *we built a good connection with the schools, with other NGOs* and maybe we are not perking up the life in the region or bringing a complete change, but *we are strengthening the network of civil society and public institutions*. So that's one more thing. And *also the teachers and school directors always want the volunteers to go*, they really enjoy when they are there, which is positive feedback. (V., Hungary – Organiser)

> I was thinking before I came here we will be like Erasmus+ projects, we will be all together here, in one place, but we are changing the place for working…*it is like we are involving community, we are always in contact with them. Let say with the mayor that is coming every day asking for us how is it going, they are sharing the ideas*. (R., Spain – Volunteer)
>
> The local volunteers were also history and tourism students and for them it was really *useful to be able to reach out to the schools, to also be leaders, to really own the project*. (J., France – Photographer)
>
> A lot of people who had never taken part in these kinds of projects before made themselves available to help the volunteers. They never asked anything in exchange for giving a hand, everyone always supported us. I can even say that *we have discovered a real connection between the local actors.* We could feel this will of mutual aid, which wasn't that obvious before the project. (G., Italy – Deputy Mayor)
>
> Camp leaders always wanted to invite the mayor. I was telling them that mayor doesn't care about us at all. But nevertheless they sent him the email and last year he came for the first time. And it was the first time he appeared here. (L., Czech Republic – Local partner)

Institutional and community links are also what support the participation of volunteers with less opportunities: the understanding and recognition of the learning and experiential potential of the camps provides both symbolic validation and concrete support to the involvement of diverse youth. Integration depends on relational infrastructures – the workcamp organisation becomes an interface of trust linking community dynamics, bureaucratic systems and human stories:

> Because that's what the population is waiting for, what young people are waiting for. *It's not easy to bring young people together in our rural communities because, for various reasons,*

they are scattered. But the project also allows us to bring them together a little, to meet these young people and have discussions with them; in that respect, it's very positive. (M., France – Mayor)

Before you can even convince the young people, *you have to convince your colleagues, then the institution*... it takes four or five months before they approve it. (M., France – Social Worker)

Many people want to do it, but they either don't have time, or they feel a bit scared - 'social inclusion, what is that?' In the end we're doing it all the time; everything is social inclusion. So we try to make it as easy as possible and have tools and resources ready for everyone… we've created a series of documents. […] *What we try to do in the group is to support organisations that want to work in inclusion, to give them tools and practices, and also to inspire others*. (A., Germany – Organiser)

I learnt how to deal with administration [for refugee volunteers], and we had our group-leader, this was a rare case of the group-leader being from another country, and I learnt from him how to run a project and delegate tasks. (K., Hungary – Organiser)

Leadership and adaptation

This moral pedagogy is structured by leadership practices that translate ideals into workflow: ritualised beginnings and closures, collective gearing-up, shared tool discipline, and explicit goals setting 'just under' aspiration to enable success by stretching efforts into a zone of proximal development. Finishing matters for meaning and closure provides ethical punctuation that consolidates learning, and attunes participants to mutual accountability rather than consumption of experience:

I keep it simple: *why we're doing it, how we'll do it, and then we go*. We gear up together (gloves, goggles), collect tools together, and we stop 20 minutes early to tidy the site - so you

feel you want to work again when you return. Every tool has its place; if something's missing, we all go back to fetch it. Be transparent when things go well or not-calm, patient, pedagogical.' (J., France – Leader)

> With a municipality I plan one medium goal doable in two weeks for a three-week camp, plus small optional tasks. Groups vary; sometimes we finish early, sometimes later. *But the presented goal must be achieved - finishing matters for meaning*. (N., France – Organiser)
>
> I read who handles the saw well - they'll lead a small group. The strong one who scatters - I give him a steady task. I organize the site by energies, not rigid theory. *Objectives are set a bit under what we hope, so we can exceed them and let satisfaction seal the learning*. (N., France – Organiser)
>
> > Organisation and anticipation - those are my two words. I visualize the end of the site and I actively invite critique. If I forget a tool, the whole group goes back with me; leaving them alone leads to drift. *Keep the group together so pauses and work both remain collective*. (J., France – Leader)
> >
> > > One Monday, no staff showed for five planned sites, 80 people ready to work. I pivoted: explained the situation, proposed a collective stone-chain from the river for a future dry-stone wall, brought the sound system, and we went. *You always keep a 'backup site' in your pocket*. (J., France – Leader)

Competence and leadership are co-constructed, with transmission seen as a collaborative process. Learning is reciprocal and hierarchy is reduced through transparency and acknowledging shared ignorance. Leadership is modelled by example, and inclusion and equity are prioritised. Place-based pedagogy always plays a central role:

> It's really about transmitting know-how. And sometimes I'm the one who learns - people advise me too. We do transformation: herbs into syrups, jams, gardening, stonework, drywall, wood floors, painting, levelling. Sometimes I tell the teens: *I've never done this either, so*

we'll do it together. Being transparent like that pulls people in. It's co-construction; what matters is adapting to people's level, their desire, their rhythm. (J., France – Leader)

I understood that *I have to leave other people to do things and to cooperate*, so my team-leading and group-dynamic skills improved a lot. (K., Hungary – Organiser)

I realized that the most important thing is to be empathetic towards the people, to *try to perceive their needs* and that a good leader must be a person who is empathetic and is able to tune into others. (V., Czech Republic – Leader)

It's not about having a social worker's degree; it's about working with people, observing, listening… *We need people who know what a work camp is and who are committed.* (T., Greece – Organiser)

Adaptive pedagogy positions the workcamp as a versatile tool, enabling tailored engagement that aligns with individual learning trajectories. Volunteering within the components of the group is not a uniform experience; rather, it serves as a diverse set of resources within the framework of social accompaniment. But the ultimate teacher is work and its realisations, when participants are accompanied to build their own path, individually and collectively, across a new threshold:

We set a realistic target for the week, for instance building two platforms; we reach it by Wednesday, *then stretch a bit further*. *It shows them they can go beyond comfort without breaking. The satisfaction comes because the stretch is tangible and finished*. (N., France – Organiser)

The analysis of work as a pedagogical source of relation has shown that manual, collective labour plays a distinctive role in International Workcamps. Shared work creates conditions of equality, mutual dependence, and practical solidarity that challenge pre-existing hierarchies. Meaningful labour becomes a language in itself - one that enables communication beyond cultural and linguistic difference, and grounds ethical commitments in concrete action. However, the effects of these relational practices do not end with the completion of the project.

Both individual participants and community representatives repeatedly reflect on how the experience of working together reshapes their sense of self, responsibility, and belonging beyond the workcamp. The final analytic chapter therefore turns to examining how transformation is carried forward, re-negotiated, or contested once participants leave the protected space of the camp.

IX.

Becoming and return

Transformation, continuity and identity repair

I had the feeling that no one knows me,

I am in a foreign country, and I can be myself.

So, I became myself.

(M., Hungary – Local volunteer)

Re-entry and continuity of service

Looking at the end of the volunteer experience, data portray a reflexive arc in which participants narrate a reconfigured self that is recognised by others and stabilised through meaningful accomplishment. Volunteers and communities both describe social mirroring alongside retrospective coherence, suggesting that post-camp sense-making converts dispersed episodes into a durable identity claim, to which the existence of tangible and durable outcomes – both in terms of artefacts and relationships contribute largely. Purpose seeking is not incidental: workcamps provide time, tasks, and plural viewpoints that cannot travel alone, allowing 'doing' to materialize into self-definition. Recognition is embodied: finishing a wall or a storage building produces visible evidence, anchoring confidence in the world rather than in private sentiment. This is why the return often involves pride tokens and place-based revisits, with testimonies of long-term attachment by returned volunteers to the 'tiny piece of stone' built years earlier.

Re-entry is framed as a shift from dependency to agency, with effects that are both immediate (greater autonomy, self-efficacy in travel, communication across difference) and longitudinal

(beneficiaries becoming volunteers, volunteers becoming staff or leaders). The pipeline effect recurs through improved language and work competences that also translate into employability; role aspiration emerges directly from camp atmospheres; and cyclical engagement (stepping back to avoid burnout, then returning) indicates that continuity depends on rhythm as much as on intensity. These trajectories are not only individual - but they also rely on anticipation and memory in host settings ('they are excited… they ask about it'), which make the next cycle easier to enter and normalize volunteering as a life orientation rather than a one-off event.

Sustaining change hinges on hubs, networks, and material residues. Local organisations, schools, and centres function as anchor points where identity capital can be practiced and renewed; children who once met volunteers later staff projects, and reading corners or mini-libraries continue to attract users after the camps end. Material memory matters: murals, paths, and small restorations condense shared labour into civic landmarks and returning to them confirms belonging. Trust accumulates through repeated cooperation, and convivial micro-practices ('saying bonjour,' cooking together) recalibrate everyday atmospheres in ways residents and officials recognize. These affective and material traces help turn volunteering into routine. What begins as an exceptional encounter becomes a community's seasonal rhythm and a person's biographical habit.

Data thus also articulates an ethics of continuity. Respondents critique romantic metaphors of 'sowing seeds' unless they are paired with concrete follow-up, educational integration, and realistic boundaries ('sometimes… not the right time'). Structural frictions persist - awareness gaps beyond inclusion circles, under-resourced organisations, physical accessibility limits - but participants formulate safeguards against 'holiday inclusion'. Building local partnerships, ensuring post-camp opportunities, and pacing involvement to readiness are all common results. In short, enduring transformation relies less on the intensity of the initial threshold than on the quality of the bridges that carry people across it.

Finally, becoming is shown as both cognitive and moral, and anxiety gives way to courage. Foreignness reframes home, empathy grows through contrast with others' hardships and adaptation becomes a transferable life skill. Many accounts close with forward-leaning aspirations, desiring new projects, studies, or careers in civic fields - and they often follow through with durable ties across borders. Some stabilize into maintenance rather than further change, indicating that normalization is itself a developmental outcome. Across cases, 'return' names not a closure but a new stance toward the world: a readiness to participate, to keep networks alive, and to treat work done with others as the substrate of an enlarged, more capacious self.

Changing perspectives

The interviews depict workcamps as catalytic spaces where participants test , and often reauthor, their self-concept. Moving beyond familiar audiences, volunteers describe a loosening of shyness and a discovery of voice through use of English, public contribution, and recognition by peers. This identity work is not abstract: it crystallizes in the felt shift from passivity to authorship and initiative, with several accounts stressing a newfound readiness to participate as an ongoing stance rather than a single act. The experience also proves that origin and prior skill are not decisive; enthusiasm, guidance and training can unlock capability and credible belonging:

> Workcamps mean to…to…yeah, help with *deciding to move and be another person*. (J., Germany – Volunteer)
>
> I can say that experience changed me in many different ways. I realized a lot of things. I was without my sister for the first time, I invited a friend, but we didn't spend so much time together. *And I could find myself*. I was not shy, and I could use my English. *I had the feeling that no one knows me, I am in a foreign country, and I can be myself. So, I became*

myself. And I saw that people liked me, they liked who I am, and this meant a lot to me. (M., Hungary – Local volunteer)

It stimulated my appetite... not for food, but for *travelling, seeing other people, other cultures*. (V., France – Volunteer)

I feel much more confident about travelling alone. So many people told me it's going to be ok. And now I think so. (R., Spain – Volunteer)

I gained more self-confidence, and I became braver. (M., Hungary – Local volunteer)

For me, I was really narrow-minded, really and... but now it´s really, I can really now think, as I see from other people, they just come to this place, they take it so easily, the take the plane and come to this place. And I also see myself – yeah, just go to another different place and don´t be scared too much about what can happen and everything, because it dominated my mindset a little bit. (J., Germany – Volunteer)

I became more world citizen and closer to understand this. And *I look on my country from another perspective* after this first experience. (A., Russia – Volunteer)

Competence gains are framed as transferable and embodied. Participants report increases in autonomy (confidence to travel alone, navigate unfamiliar contexts, make phone calls to advocate for themselves), interpersonal efficacy (communicating and cooperating with different kinds of people), and courage understood as a durable disposition. Crucially, these are learned in the grain of co-production: planning sessions, inventing games, and sharing country stories cultivate practical judgment, ethical awareness, and a respect for difference that 'travelling only' rarely yields. Volunteers repeatedly narrate a widening cognitive framework going from narrowness to ease with mobility and uncertainty, suggesting that competence here includes an attitudinal elasticity toward the world:

After the workcamp I realized I feel myself more self-confident first and I realized *I can communicate and cooperate with different kind of people*. (A., Russia – Volunteer)

Courageousness, it helps to be more courageous not only me but also with others, *to intercede with somebody or to solve things, to do something more*. (J., Slovakia – Volunteer)

I believe that this really proves that you can come from anywhere, from nowhere, you can have no skills in a particular field, but with enthusiasm, guidance and training, you can achieve great things. (N., Belgium – Local partner)

Finally, the aftertaste of participation is prospective. Exposure to plural views stimulates appetite for cultures, languages, and further service - and this desire is socialized through the friendships and weak ties forged on site. Relationships become conduits for future movement (visits, new camps, organizing together), while the successful completion of shared tasks anchors self-belief in visible action. In short, the camp experience fuses capability with motivation. Participants leave not only braver and more skilled, but oriented toward continued engagement, carrying a practical conviction that collective work can change both selves and situations.

I look at myself and I say I am a human, and I make mistakes, but who doesn't […] I discovered things about myself and others, but *I still can't wait to participate in something. It doesn't matter what, but I want to participate*. (M., Hungary – Volunteer)

At my last workcamp as a participant, I was this summer […] and when I talked to the camp leader and when *they came to talk about how to lead workcamp* and also then came people from the office of the organisation, so I started feeling…yeah I guess I started feeling to be part…*I started to feel I am a part of some international network*. (V., Czech Republic – Leader)

Another reason is that we had to work together. It was not just for fun. We planned sessions, created new games, explained stories from our countries. If it was not a

workcamp, I would not have the chance to hear these stories and never *experience seeing the way foreign people work, like the attitudes, approaches, ethics.* To say it simply, it gave me enough time and different points of view, and I cannot have these two by travelling only. (R., Hungary – Volunteer)

It´s also about friendships, because some people who are at workcamp *if they fit well with each other can be in relationship* or can go to other workcamps, or organize something or to *visit each other* in other country like 'hi, we met there and there can I come to visit you - yeah, yeah', so I go to China, or there, there, there, so also this is added value. (J., Slovakia – Volunteer)

There was a Mexican volunteer on a workcamp, and two years later J. and his wife went to Mexico. They went to see the young man; they had exchanges because they had kept in touch by letter. (L., France – Local partner)

Therapeutic reawakening

For young people arriving from precarious circumstances, the camp often functions as a therapeutic reawakening rather than a brief diversion. Small, visible wins - calling a contact person, navigating a missed bus, completing a task - accumulate into a felt sense of competence and dignity. Recognition matters: certificates and media clippings are shown with pride, while the everyday civility of 'bonjour', shared meals, and a calmer atmosphere signal to staff that relational climates have shifted. Practitioners caution against romantic 'seed' metaphors without follow-up; they frame the arc as preparation–experience–aftermath, insisting that benefits fade without post-camp scaffolding. When that continuum is in place, the change is palpable. A youth who arrived lethargic and resistant can depart upright and engaged, asking for news, wanting to return, and newly open to others:

If we miss the follow-up, if we do it badly or if we don't do it at all, all the benefits will quickly fade away. We have a beautiful expression: we have sown a seed. It's pretty, but what

does it mean? What seed? When will it sprout? ... It's easy to hide behind that... We say that the workcamp is part of a journey, but it is not a predefined stage... *the preparation, the experience itself and the aftermath are already a journey*. (E., France – Organiser)

After his first activity, he *felt revitalised* even though he had only been there for a weekend. They had a life, feelings, experiences to live... *they want to get it back and share it*. (G., Belgium – Organiser)

The first thing they do is show you a certificate... the newspaper... *they are proud of what they have done.* They were capable of doing things... they talk about it with stars in their eyes. (D., Belgium – Local partner)

The most significant change is the conviviality... the different, more relaxed atmosphere... They always say hello to everyone. (R., Belgium – Local partner)

The practical horizon of this reawakening is autonomy. Camps require participants to move through the world - travel independently, communicate across languages, adapt to unfamiliar expectations - and in doing so they rehearse the competencies demanded 'after the centre'. Social workers report a shift from dependence and complaint to initiative and problem-solving; young people extend their stays, express desire to go again, and begin to imagine themselves as actors of their own path. Crucially, the experience also recalibrates perspective. Essentially, exposure to others' hardships relativizes one's own, fostering empathy alongside resilience:

My youngster […] was so angry to be there, miserable, with all his aggressiveness, and all his very difficult background, with all his injections making him totally lifeless, making him sleeping all the time, with this self-exclusion, this introversion, and his complains because he 'doesn't like to build the walls, doesn't like to do workcamps', he didn't want to be there and so on. And then the same guy, back on track, head high, smiling and kidding, who says goodbye to everyone crying and asking for contact details of each one, who is still asking for news to the other volunteers, *who says he loved to work on the wall, who opened his mind to everything*! (C., Peru – Camp leader)

With young people whom we didn't know how best to support, it *turned out that they had a lot of resources within them after all*... one young person who was supposed to leave after two weeks ended up staying for three. And all the young people want to go again. […] The workcamp encourages them to be independent... to simply grow up. And not to rely on the people around them, because at 21, they leave the centre and have to fend for themselves. (N., France – Social Worker)

It can give them *a certain degree of independence*... They have to get around on their own, speak the language, communicate... It's very much *a question of autonomy* and independence from the centres. (C., Belgium – Social Worker)

They missed their bus... *they managed to find a solution to that problem. It helped me: they have resources*. It also allows me to work differently... I ask them: what solutions are there? And I don't do it for them. (N., France – Social Worker)

He managed to pick up the phone and call the contact person... I thought it was brilliant that he was able to do that. (D., Belgium – Local partner)

Momentum carries forward when networks are built. Returning participants seek continued contact (even one afternoon a week), enrol in qualifications such as the BAFA [Certificate of aptitude for youth and children activities animator functions], and, in some cases, secure employment linked to the project. The social ripple is visible: neighbourhood talk, photos shared, and a growing willingness to travel among peers. Staff describe a decisive interior shift as trust formed in collective work becomes a bridge into real life. Where institutions align around that bridge, the camp's therapeutic spark consolidates into a trajectory of independence, participation, and renewed possibility:

He's someone who's always complaining, looking for commiseration, and there, on the project, he *ended up being very autonomous*. My job is to make them actors of their own path. So this helps me working with them. *Now he's proactive, he's interested, he's…volunteer, for his own life path.* (N., France – Social worker)

> Telling yourself that *you are no longer a free electron... but that you are going to create connections... the network for life* after the [asylum] centre. […] Knowing that there is som*eone you can trust*... because you have done a workcamp, you have experienced something, it's huge. (RC., Belgium – Local partner)

> Frankly, adapting to the environment you're in and the people you're with. Making do with what you have. […] Because I saw that they were talking of a higher level, *I tried to keep up with them... That's what I call adapting. And I find that useful in life all the time*. (V., France – Volunteer)

> People are talking about it in the neighbourhood... it has created a willingness to travel. They show the photos, and *it makes others want to go*. (M., France – Social Worker)

> He said to me: 'If I leave, will I still be able to go to the Compagnons Bâtisseurs group?' […] Even if it was just one afternoon or one night instead of three... because *it's still really important to him*. (D., Belgium – Local partner)

Local ownership and grassroots continuation

Local ownership emerges first as rhythm. Communities that once watched cautiously now anticipate the camps' return. Children ask when the next group will arrive, classes plan around visits, and villagers describe the period as a renovating time they now recognize and welcome. Repetition breeds trust and recognition: the same places are reinhabited, and small artefacts - a section of wall, a playful graffito in a barn - become mnemonic anchors of shared labour. These traces help turn foreignness into familiarity. What began as a tentative encounter becomes a recurring civic appointment that normalizes contact and sustains participation across years:

> And also, I think it's good for the children that they are always sad when the volunteers leave, but *they know that the new ones will come, so there is a continuity there*. When they hear Egyesek volunteers will come, they are happy, excited, and ok, maybe they participate a

bit more. When they hear that the volunteers will come to their geography class, *they are looking forward to it, they ask about it, so yes, they are excited.* (I., Hungary – Local partner)

I can see [that sometimes Czech people are scared of foreign people] but in this village is different, they are willing to meet us. *They know something is happening in this house, we are not the first here I think, so they know we are coming from time to time* and its nice time they can have with us. (R., Spain – Volunteer)

I don't mean to say that there was reluctance on the part of the population... that would be wrong... but, um... a certain attitude at the beginning. And *now the projects are really eagerly awaited by the population, and it's not uncommon now for people to ask me, 'When are the young people coming?'*. (M., France – Mayor)

People come back to the village decades later and stand before a small wall section they built at nineteen. *That tiny piece of stone carries a long memory: a proof of being part of a place.* (N., France – Organiser)

So *it will stay here forever*…[…] these are all memorials of summer workcamps and we would not do this… simply graffiti…but real graffiti soot from the chimney... real mortar… and *thanks to this it can be here and the place has its own spirit*… that one is going somewhere to a small rock and there are sculptures… or that it is barn, but it has graffiti… and *this gives to the place much higher energy*. (J., Czech Republic – Local partner)

From that rhythm grows diffusion. Visible work catalyses imitation and new initiatives. For example, reading corners continue to attract children, families who hesitated about schooling begin to enrol, and neighbourhood pride turns into requests from companies to co-sponsor murals. Municipalities and organisations start to cooperate horizontally - lending equipment, adjusting logistics, even budgeting transport so remote youth can join. Media attention widens the circle, and hosting itself professionalizes local actors who learn to organise quickly and credibly. In several sites, the impulse is fully domesticated. Door-to-door waste collection

begins, annual beach clean-ups become tradition, and villages found their own association to continue conservation beyond any single camp:

> The impact of the mini library is that children gain more interest and habit in reading. Even though not yet to every child, but I see more children are interested to the library and stay to read something here. Not only during the workcamp. *It is still happening until now*. […] Children and parents without willingness to go to school, after joining the program in the workcamp, they consider enrolling their children to school. *They have future dreams*. (P., Indonesia – Local partner)

> As a result, we started door to door collection of waste so that people need not throw away. So *this idea which we got from international volunteers is working well with the community*. (R., India – Local partner)

> We are already getting some requests about the mural paintings. Not from the government, but from the companies. When the companies want to contribute to a certain community, like painting the walls, if they have some budget for that and think about the places that they should invest in, then they will surely choose Songjung. *It is because of the painted walls that the volunteers from the workcamps worked hard on, so we are having more and more requests about this*. Since it gained the publicity and people talk about volunteering in Songjung, companies want to come to Songjung for volunteering… (Y., Korea – Local partner)

> In Meymand we had a very close relationship with inhabitants… one of the volunteers was from the village… *they started a small NGO, and they still work on that*. (N., Iran – Organiser)

> At first, we organize international coastal cleaning day by involving local people and volunteers, but *now every year this program continuing as a tradition. Every year local youth, government and community people organize beach cleaning day*

in their village by themselves and clean the beach which is positive growth and initiative from community. (R., India – Local partner)

Crucially, the social meaning of volunteering shifts from spectacle to pathway. Young people read the presence of internationals as a mirror of possibility and respect crystallises into self-projection, altered aspirations, and, for some, vocational change. Partners describe building durable networks around the camp, connecting associations, schools, and municipal offices into an ecosystem that can continue what others have started. In this way, grassroots continuation is not an afterthought but the form that transformation takes. It becomes a locally authored cycle of practices, partnerships, and places that keeps the work alive when the camp departs:

Before and after each time they come...*we want to continue what others have started*... this ongoing dynamic. (R., Belgium – Local partner)

The young people, the older ones, 18 to 25 years old, they thought 'Fu*!, they did this big travel, they are volunteers, only to come and do animations, for us, for young people, for the children, for the inhabitants, it is great, respect!' … So here is the interest of the international in a neighbourhood, that *allows young people or residents to really get conscious of their competences, their ability to take an active role in their neighbourhood, and in their life*. To show them, to open up new possibilities. (G., France – Organiser)

First of all, *the project had an impact on us working in the municipality*, because we had to start working very quickly to host the volunteers and organize the activities. But it also had an impact on all the other people involved who have *made it possible for us to gain the community's recognition and gratitude*. (G., Italy – Deputy Mayor)

If we can support the mobility of the volunteers at these very big sites, we can reach out to more communities, as many of them live very deep in the forest and it is difficult to involve them in the activities far from their home. It is very interesting but at the same time very challenging, and we've been working actively on this with the site managers. *They are now dedicating a small budget to provide transport and*

help mobilize more local youth. Our organisation provides the fuel... and the volunteers, they provide the work! (E., Uganda - Organiser)

> We have asked for help to the entertaining/music band of the county office, ending up with having an association with them.[…] *It started to have some connection in the community with other associations or organisations, then it started to get well-known and got bigger and bigger*. So, people came to know the fact that our centre has this kind of activity, workcamp. […] *We are trying to build a network* related to this camps and centre. (W., Korea – Local partner)

The workcamp experience appears as an open-ended and fragile process, extending beyond the temporal and spatial boundaries of the workcamp. Return is not framed as a simple application of learning, but as a moment of re-entry marked by tension between newly acquired dispositions and existing social structures. Participants describe carrying traces of the encounter, such as altered sensitivities, ethical questions, and relational skills. They also face resistance, dissonance, or partial loss. The process of becoming thus appears not as a stable outcome, but as an ongoing negotiation shaped by memory, context, and continued and guided practice, essential to complete the transformational journey. Taken together, the five analytic dimensions developed in this thesis - encounter, discomfort, place, work, and becoming - form the basis for articulating a grounded philosophy of the Other, to which the concluding chapter now turns.

X.

For a grounded philosophy of the Other

It's not real life either...

but it's close...

being on a workcamp

(M., Belgium – Local partner)

International Workcamps emerge as threshold-spaces where otherness is not bypassed but made pedagogically productive. They turn the 'pain of the threshold' into a method: anxiety, friction and disorientation are not failures but catalytic conditions that convert strangers into partners in common projects. In this sense, the camp operates as a carefully framed micro-society. It is structured enough to be safe, and open enough to be transformative. These camps thrive where contact is purpose-led (shared goals and tasks), cooperative (doing with), and authority-supported (leaders, partners, institutions). This configuration realises, in practice, the classical contact conditions while explicitly embracing discomfort as the ground on which new ethical relations can be built.

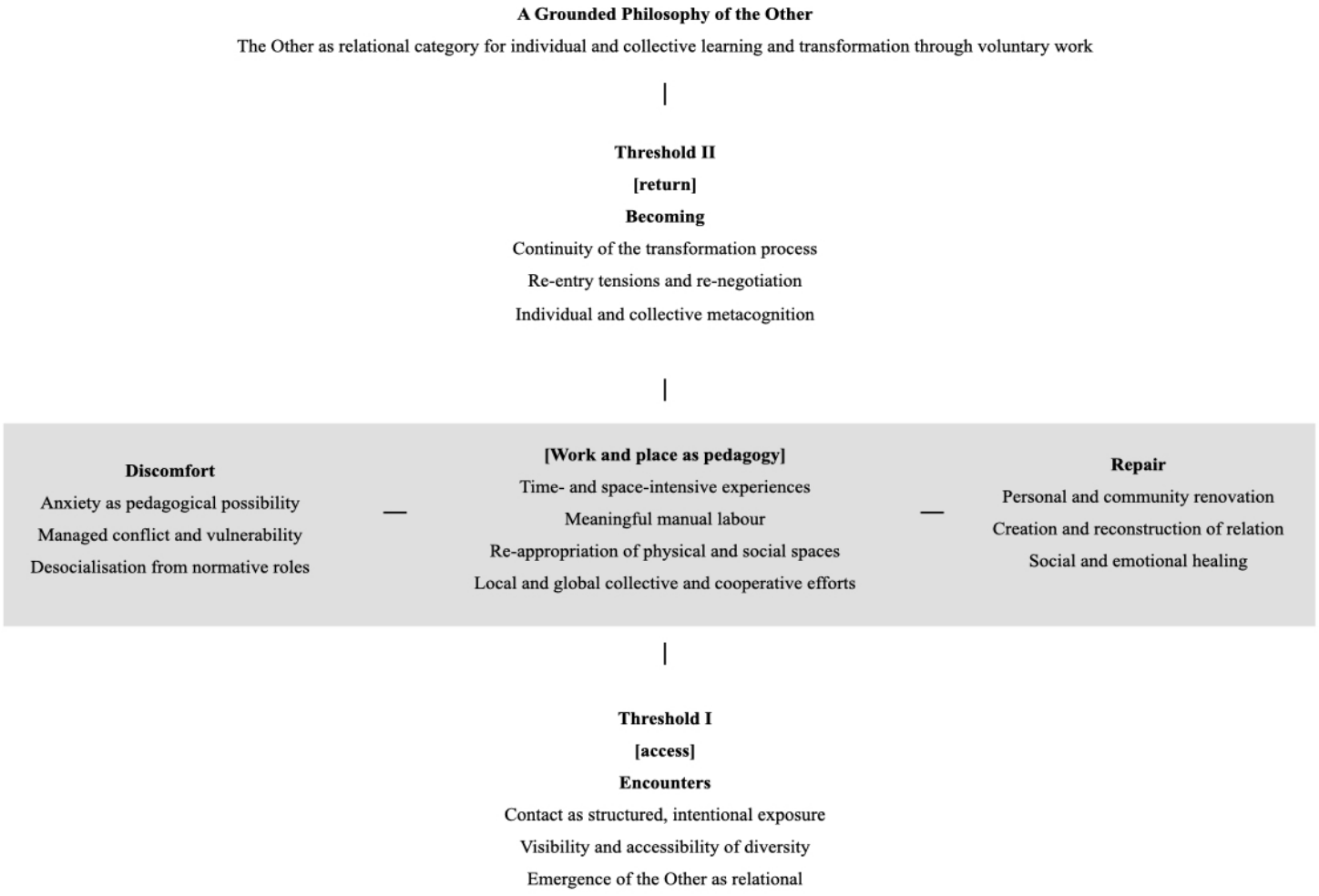
As the testimonies from workcamp actors show, transformation is materially anchored: places 'speak' through restoration, water and soil become moral teachers, and finished artefacts feed identity and memory. The hand, the tool, and the site mediate relation; craft becomes a civic language that outpaces speech and helps redistribute agency. In parallel, dense associational linkages such as youth centres, municipalities, NGOs, schools and social workers extend the camp's effects beyond its temporal bounds, enabling continuity, re-entry, and local ownership.

Put together, the elements described by the volunteers, local partners, organisers and leaders create a shared and grounded philosophy of the Other. It is a complex but linear process,

guaranteeing workcamp *access* to people from extremely different backgrounds, and accompanying them through the first threshold of participation. Also, these elements are creating conditions for truly diverse *contact and encounters*, leveraging the physical and emotional educational value of both *work and place as relation* to support participants in dealing with *uncertainty.* This uncertainty may be about oneself and/or the Other. The support can further extend to repairing personal and social structures while restoring real spaces, and encouraging personal and community autonomy and sustainability through and beyond the *return* to 'real' life. Such support allows them to pass a second crucial threshold towards renewed personal *becoming*, and a deeper understanding that in creating interdependent global communities 'true resonance presupposes the *proximity of the Other*' (Han, 2018, p.6).

The diagram proposed in Figure 2 in the following page traces a pedagogically complex double-linear transformation process. The first threshold is represented by the very access to the encounters proposed by the workcamps through the creation of the institutional and practical conditions for open structured contact; diachronically, the combined pedagogy of work and place then generates throughout the implementation of the workcamp scaffolded learning anchored in meaningful cooperation for local actions. Synchronically, the passage from discomfort and anxiety to repaired personal and interpersonal relations mirrors and consolidates at the psychological and social level the material change modifying the physical spaces through practical work. The re-entry, renegotiation, and metacognitive integration of learning upon return to the 'real life' allows both the volunteers and the local communities to consider the experience of the Other as the leverage point for personal and social change.

Figure 2. *Fundamental processes in the grounded philosophy of the Other of International Workcamps.*



Read from bottom to top, the figure makes visible how the thesis' five themes operate not as parallel ingredients but as a sequence of pedagogical conditions that cumulatively produce a grounded philosophy of the Other. The first threshold (access) marks the passage into a protected micro-society where diversity becomes visible and contact is intentionally structured through shared tasks and objectives, cooperation, and authority support; this is where the Other first appears as relational and cooperative rather than as an abstract and potentially estranged category. The shaded central band represents the camp's intensive core: discomfort is treated as a pedagogical possibility (managed vulnerability, conflict, desocialisation), while work and place function together as mediating infrastructures through which relation is enacted materially. Hands, tools, sites, and shared effort make learning durable and communicable to the extent of contributing to repair dynamics in which restored spaces and reconstructed relations become mutually reinforcing, enabling personal and collective healing, local ownership, and renewed agency. The second threshold (return) then captures the fragile extension of this process beyond the camp, where transformation continues through re-entry tensions, renegotiation in 'real life', and individual and collective metacognition - showing that becoming is not guaranteed, but made more likely when the participants – volunteers, communities and organisations alike – are accompanied to recognise and acknowledging the change.

As suggested from the introduction, all the elements of this grounded philosophy do reverberate with existing research in different fields, confirming the multi-disciplinary interest of this thesis as well as its limitations and further potential to stimulate additional research. The work done by workcamp organisations to promote social integration through meaningful cooperation shadows Freire's (1974) commitment to a pedagogy of the oppressed, and the conditions of the encounters facilitated resemble those described by Allport (1954) first and Pettigrew (1994) later, with a key role also played by new friendships (Turner et al., 2007); the emphasis on meaningful work as a tool for conviviality detached from its economic value echoes the lifetime commitment of Illich (1973; 2009), and the camp leaders scaffolding

approach to assisted learning inevitably reminds of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (Chaiklin, 2003). This work's implications for formal and non-formal learning (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990), and the very notion of intentional learning choices (Metcalfe & Kornell, 2005) must also be considered. Moreover, the role of physical and natural spaces in enhancing cross-cultural understanding – nature as Other – remind of the deep connections explored by Global Ecology; at the conjunction of Global Studies and Ecology (Grinin, 2018). Finally, the meta-cognition value of post-return reflexion and acknowledgment of personal and social learning from the volunteers and the community reflect Kolb's experiential cycle (1984).

While this thesis aimed at demonstrating how the combination of these elements gives life to a unique and shared philosophy underlining the concrete implementation of non-formal education practices – intended, organised, and that can be replicated – several aspects remain unexplored and open to both criticism and further research. First of all, the thesis is built on, and is a mirror of, the *current* concepts utilised by the actors of International Workcamps. It does not, however, address the historical roots of the workcamp philosophy and their evolution. Utilising the large amount of existing archives about International Workcamps, including the tools employed by the organisations (camp leader training guides, information sheets for participants, evaluation reports, etc.) could help bring the spotlight on the history and development of workcamp exchange philosophies. As a source for a history of volunteering representations and cultures, archives reflect a strong philosophical engagement towards realising in practice the historically evolving ideals of cooperation imagined by different workcamp actors since the early 1920s, and a new research project in this direction is already being developed with Northumbria University, in the UK. The learning dimension of workcamps, which as suggested by this thesis relies heavily on the meta-cognition efforts upon the return to the everyday life of the actors, should also be given more attention. In particular, the conditions for moving from the essential steps of self-recognition and acknowledgment of learning to a larger and more usable certification of workcamps' global education potential will

require a combination of standard measures (as those cited in the chapter about 'inherited tools') and advocacy for adoption by the formal education sector and the work market. Here too, a major project is starting in the framework of CCIVS partnerships to study the conditions for an evidence-based certification system, in cooperation with Manicaland State University of Applied Science in Zimbabwe. This project will also allow the community to collect additional data from countries not represented in the interviews utilised for this thesis, thus further grounding future refinements of the philosophy proposed here. Finally, the growing ecological preoccupations of workcamp organisations and their evolving practices to promote climate justice – with over a third of the workcamps now exclusively dedicated every year to environmental issues – deserve the same attention that has been given in the past to workcamp's peace education priority. The relation between volunteers and communities now fully includes the respect and reappropriation of their spaces of encounter, bringing in the idea of nature as Other. Studying the crucial role played by workcamps in facilitating contact not only with human diversity, but with ecological diversity, would represent an extremely valuable area of contribution for Global Ecology studies in particular, aligning volunteer efforts with the wider ecological movement shaking the world consciences today.

Ultimately, the true contribution of this thesis will be to provide an updated, grounded theory of the Other as approached today by the volunteers, communities and organisations that meet in these spaces of transformation. Because following Lewin's popular maxim, there's 'nothing as practical as a good theory' – and even a bad one can help stimulate the discussions and further promote workcamps' understanding, improvement and recognition. I came to research the same way I had engaged in volunteering, perfectly described by the words of a local partner in Hungary: 'To be honest at least half of them came because they didn't know what to do with their life. I think the kind of people who need workcamps are those who are a bit lost and trying to learn about themselves'.

I go back to practice with a little more knowledge, many as lifechanging encounters, and thinking with Clifford Geertz (1995) that it was an ‘excellent way, interesting, dismaying, useful, and amusing, to expend a life’.

As a place of transformation, the threshold *hurts*.

The negativity of pain inheres in it: if you feel the pain of the thresholds,

you are not a tourist; the transition can occur.

(Han Byung-Chul, *The expulsion of the other*)

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Appendix A

Codebook

Table 1.

Final coding families and sub-codes.

Code family 1.	**Camp as Encounter (Human relations and thresholds)**
Sub-code	**Descriptors**
1.1 Threshold entry (departures)	Pre-arrival choice, first contact, 'why', parental consent, travel, first briefings, support.
1.2 Mixity as method (diversity in practice)	Intentionally mixed groups (nationalities, background), ordinary cohabitation, reciprocity of exchange.
1.3 Host contact and conviviality	Meals, micro-rituals, affective climate, atmosphere, play.
1.4 Institutional interfaces	Links with youth centres/NGOs/municipalities, onboarding, gatekeeping, educators, civil society/public networks.
1.5 Visibility and (de-)narratives (stereotype shift)	Media, photos, visits, curiosity, demystifying 'foreigners', talks.
Code family 2.	**Learn through discomfort (Transformative and emotional processes)**
Sub-code	**Descriptors**
2.1 Anxiety/uncertainty management	Fear of communication/adaptation, gaze of the others, reframing as growth, overcoming through living/working together.
2.2 Simplicity and austerity as freedom	The outside, fresh air, joy of the 'less' (cold showers, dorms) as solidarity/vitality.
2.3 Conflict as pedagogy	Tension for learning, boundary-setting, explicit facilitation moves, proximal development challenges.
2.4 Reflexive reframing and empathy	Perspective shifts; re-reading motives; generosity through living-with. 'I first thought they were selfish… then I understood.'
2.5 Affective repair / uplift	Re-humanisation through confrontation, mirroring, participation.
Code family 3.	**Place as Pedagogy (Embodied, spatial and material learning, including *Nature as Other*)**
Sub-code	**Descriptors**

3.1 Hands-on ecological learning	Learning through restoration/conservation tasks at a specific place. 'Rare chance to use their hands to save a site.'
3.2 Environmental aesthetics and care	Beautification, recycling, art linking aesthetics to ethics.
3.3 Water/soil ethics	Natural elements as counterparts shaping awareness, orienting practices. 'mud, water' decide.
3.4 Heritage as identity practice, re-appropriation of spaces	Sites reclaimed/narrated/opened to publics over time. New access, repeated community use and engagement.
3.5 Tangible legacy and place-memory	Finished pieces, repeated visits, durable traces of belonging. Pride in walls, returning to what 'we made'
Code family 4.	**Work as Relation (Collective action, purpose and meaning)**
Sub-code	**Descriptors**
4.1 Work as 'œuvre' (meaningful, finished, visible)	Purpose named; proper execution of work; pride/tears signal moral labour. 'Finishing matters for meaning.'
4.2 From doing for to doing with (co-production)	Residents shift from spectators to actors; credibility through action; local participation, leadership.
4.3 Scaffolding and accompaniment (proximal development)	Leaders match task/energy/ability, pacing, safety, group steadiness. 'Set targets slightly under, to exceed them'.
4.4 Institutional linkages and the (restorative) commons	Projects become community assets via inter-organisational chains. Schools/centres/municipal partners steward outcomes.
4.5 Leadership learning / project apprenticeship	Volunteers acquire management/delegation/organising. Co-leading, solving resource gaps, handling stakeholders.
Code family 5.	**Becoming and Return (Post-experience transformation, continuity and identity)**
Sub-code	**Descriptors**
5.1 Re-entry and continuity of service (carry-over momentum)	'Each visit seeds the next,' networks and practices persist. 'We continue what others started… ongoing dynamic'.
5.2 Therapeutic reawakening	Improved wellbeing/agency via doing; continuity of engagement; opening of personal perspectives.
5.3 Local ownership and grassroots continuation	Post-camp initiatives (local groups/NGOs), durable stewardship. Complementary self-run efforts.

Appendix B

Table 2.

List of interviews by country and role.

Interviewee(s) File	Country	Participant Role	Year
Argentina - J	Argentina	Volunteer	2017
Belgium - JCL	Belgium	Local partner	2015
Belgium - CN	Belgium	Local partner	2015
Belgium - AS	Belgium	Local partner	2015
Belgium - NT	Belgium	Organiser	2015
Belgium - HK	Belgium	Local partner	2017
Belgium - FEDASIL	Belgium	Local partner	2017
Belgium - MD	Belgium	Organiser	2017
Belgium - Red Cross	Belgium	Local partner	2018
Belgium - Local I	Belgium	Organiser	2018
Cambodia - H	Cambodia	Local partner	2017
Cambodia - S	Cambodia	Local partner	2017
Cambodia - L	Cambodia	Local partner	2017
China - Hong Kong - School	China - Hong Kong	Local partner	2017
Congo DR - AM	DR Congo	Local partner	2017
Congo DR - Families	DR Congo	Local partner	2017
Congo DR - KTEA	DR Congo	Local partner	2017
Costa Rica - GC	Costa Rica	Local partner	2017
Costa Rica - JM	Costa Rica	Organiser	2017
Costa Rica- JBV	Costa Rica	Local partner	2017
Czech Republic - Japanese vol	Czech Republic	Volunteer	2019
Czech Republic - Slovak vol	Czech Republic	Volunteer	2019
Czech Republic - Czech vol	Czech Republic	Volunteer	2019

Czech Republic - German vol	Czech Republic	Volunteer	2019
Czech Republic - French vol	Czech Republic	Volunteer	2019
Czech Republic - Spanish vol	Czech Republic	Volunteer	2019
Czech Republic - Russian vol I	Czech Republic	Volunteer	2019
Czech Republic - Russian vol II	Czech Republic	Volunteer	2019
Czech Republic - Office Staff I	Czech Republic	Organiser	2019
Czech Republic - Office Staff II	Czech Republic	Organiser	2019
Czech Republic - Office Staff III	Czech Republic	Organiser	2019
Czech Republic - Office Staff IV	Czech Republic	Organiser	2019
Czech Republic - Support partner	Czech Republic	Local partner	2019
Ecuador - CM	Ecuador	Local partner	2017
Ecuador - KV	Ecuador	Local partner	2017
Ecuador - SI	Ecuador	Local partner	2017
France - S	France	Volunteer	2016
France - Aix - AB	France	Local partner	2015
France - Aix - AM	France	Local partner	2015
France - Aix - JR	France	Local partner	2015
France - Baum - CE	France	Leader	2015
France - Baum - Ger	France	Leader	2015
France - Baum - San	France	Local partner	2015
France - Citrus - MleH	France	Local partner	2015
France - CONC - LocVol	France	Local volunteer	2015
France - CONC - LocPar	France	Local partner	2015
France - CONC - LocInst	France	Local partner	2015
France - Crenau - LU	France	Organiser	2015
France - Crenau - ML	France	Local partner	2015
France - Crenau - MSH	France	Local volunteer	2015

France - REV - LF	France	Local partner	2015
France - REV - NG and PD	France	Local partner	2015
France - VDJ - AV	France	Local partner	2015
France - VDJ - HD	France	Local partner	2015
France - VDJ - HFC	France	Local partner	2015
France - VDJ - JF	France	Local partner	2015
France - VDJ - MG	France	Local partner	2015
France - VDJ - MM	France	Local partner	2019
France - Virevolt - BPM	France	Local partner	2019
France - Exclusion - IMP	France	Organiser	2019
France - Incl2 - IMP	France	Local partner	2019
France - Inclus - IMP	France	Local partner	2019
France - LeadCL - IMP	France	Leader	2019
France - LeaderDJU - IMP	France	Leader	2019
France - LeaderDJU 2 - IMP	France	Leader	2019
France - LuthVOL - IMP	France	Volunteer	2019
France - Nyls - IMP	France	Leader	2019
France - VolCZ - IMP	France	Volunteer	2019
France - VolsINCL - IMP	France	Volunteer	2019
Germany INT - AN	Germany	Organiser	2019
Greece - TIL	Greece	Organiser	2015
Greece - CO	Greece	Local partner	2015
Greece - DI	Greece	Local partner	2015
Greece - G and P	Greece	Local partner	2015
Greece - GI	Greece	Local partner	2015
Greece - PI	Greece	Local partner	2015
Hungary - Joh	Hungary	Organiser	2019

Hungary - Fer	Hungary	Local partner	2018
Hungary Egyesek 1.docx	Hungary	Volunteer	2019
Hungary Egyesek 2.docx	Hungary	Organiser	2019
Hungary Egyesek 3.docx	Hungary	Local partner	2019
Hungary Egyesek 4.docx	Hungary	Local partner	2019
Hungary Egyesek 5.docx	Hungary	Organiser	2019
Hungary Egyesek 6.docx	Hungary	Local partner	2019
India - KUND	India	Local partner	2015
India - DARM	India	Local partner	2015
India - MK	India	Leader	2015
India - PS	India	Local partner	2015
India - NS	India	Local partner	2015
Indonesia - PST	Indonesia	Local partner	2015
Indonesia - PMT	Indonesia	Local partner	2015
Indonesia - IET	Indonesia	Local partner	2015
Indonesia - CKD	Indonesia	Local partner	2015
Iran - WH	Iran	Organiser	2018
Italy - DM	Italy	Local partner	2015
Italy - WO	Italy	Local partner	2015
Korea - J	Korea	Volunteer	2016
Korea - JHJ	Korea	Local partner	2015
Korea - JHM	Korea	Local partner	2015
Korea - JYM	Korea	Local partner	2015
Korea - WAN Group	Korea	Local partner	2015
Korea - HK	Korea	Leader	2018
Macedonia N - Group	Macedonia North	Local partner	2018
Macedonia N - MP	Macedonia North	Local partner	2018

Macedonia N - VS	Macedonia North	Local partner	2018
Nigeria - TC	Nigeria	Leader	2018
Nigeria - TAA	Nigeria	Local partner	2018
Nigeria - OM	Nigeria	Local partner	2018
Nigeria - AYE	Nigeria	Local partner	2018
Palestine - AD	Palestine	Organiser	2018
Peru - AND	Peru	Local partner	2018
Peru - MG	Peru	Local partner	2018
Spain - CAT - J	Spain	Local partner	2018
Spain - CAT - JO	Spain	Local partner	2018
Spain - CAT - P and J	Spain	Local partner	2018
Thailand - AM	Thailand	Local partner	2018
Togo - AK	Togo	Local partner	2018
Togo - AKM	Togo	Local partner	2018
Togo DK	Togo	Local partner	2018
Uganda - NLK	Uganda	Local partner	2018
Uganda - BJL	Uganda	Local partner	2018
Uganda - KB	Uganda	Leader	2018
UK - BLA Host	United Kingdom	Local partner	2015
UK - DAV	United Kingdom	Local partner	2015
UK - NJ Family	United Kingdom	Local partner	2015
UK - PR	United Kingdom	Local partner	2015
UK - GER	United Kingdom	Local partner	2015
USA - CHA	United States	Local partner	2015

Appendix C

Table 3.

Complete matching quantitative surveys (pretest-posttest) by country of origin / service.

2015-2020	QUANTITATIVE DATA (pretest-posttest)		ORGANISATIONS
Countries/Territories	**Volunteers from**	**Serving in**	
Afghanistan	1	-	-
Albania	4	-	-
Argentina	7	7	1
Armenia	-	2	1
Austria	6	-	1
Azerbaijan	-	1	1
Bahrain	-	2	1
Belgium	19	43	2
Bulgaria	1	-	1
Burundi	1	-	-
Cambodia	1	1	1
Cameroon	1	-	-
Canada	2	3	1
China	8	16	2
Congo DR	3	-	1
Costa Rica	-	-	1
Czech Republic	84	30	1
Denmark	1	2	1
Ecuador	-	-	1
Estonia	2	11	1
Finland	1	7	1
France	155	87	3
Gambia	1	-	-
Germany	10	69	2
Ghana	-	1	1
Greece	10	24	2
Guinea	7	-	-
Guyana	1	-	-
Haiti	-	1	-
Hong Kong S.A.R.	5	8	2
Hungary	8	25	1
Iceland	2	14	1
India	2	19	2
Indonesia	10	10	2
Iran	7	12	1
Iraq	1	-	-
Ireland	1	-	-
Italy	80	28	2
Ivory Coast	1	-	-
Jamaica	2	4	1
Japan	4	9	1
Jordan	1	-	-
Kenya	2	12	2
Korea, Republic of	75	15	1
Kurdistan	1	-	-
Libya	2	-	-
Macedonia, North	14	20	1
Madagascar	-	2	-

Malaysia	-	2	-
Mali	1	-	-
Mexico	11	1	1
Moldova	1	-	-
Mongolia	-	5	-
Morocco	3	9	2
Nepal	-	4	1
Netherlands	-	1	-
Niger	1	-	-
Nigeria	3	2	1
Oman	1	-	-
Pakistan	1	-	-
Palestine	2	-	1
Peru	-	-	-
Philippines	-	8	1
Poland	39	7	1
Portugal	-	14	-
Roma nation	3	-	-
Romania	3	-	-
Russian Federation	7	2	1
Rwanda	1	-	-
Senegal	1	-	-
Serbia	1	7	1
Slovakia	2	1	1
Slovenia	-	3	1
South Africa	1	-	-
Spain	18	52	2
Sri Lanka	-	1	-
Swaziland	-	2	1
Sweden	-	1	1
Switzerland	-	5	1
Syria	1	-	-
Taiwan	4	5	1
Tanzania	-	3	1
Thailand	1	4	1
Togo	-	1	1
Tunisia	2	-	-
Turkey	-	2	-
Uganda	4	6	2
Ukraine	3	-	1
United Kingdom	-	22	1
United States	3	3	1
Vietnam	1	5	1
Zimbabwe	-	-	1
92	**663**	**663**	**72**

Appendix D

Quantitative survey design (pretest-posttest)

About the survey - Demographics

International Voluntary Service projects, like the one you are going to join soon, exist since the early 1920s, and every year more than 3,000 projects take place in all regions of the world, with more than 40,000 local, national and international volunteers working together.

Voluntary service organisations have partnered to start collecting and analyzing evidence of the strong, meaningful and long-lasting impact that International Voluntary Service projects have on the lives of the participants and local communities, highlighting the present and future contributions they can bring to personal, interpersonal and social development,as well as to common global issues like cultural heritage and diversity, and ultimately to peace.

The purpose of this questionnaire is to find how well International Voluntary Service projects serve the needs of participants like you, volunteers who dedicate time and energy to projects in your own country and around the world. The research takes place in two phases – before and after the project you join – and consists of simple questions that will take around 15 minutes to be answered. We ask you to try to be as honest and spontaneous as possible, and we thank you in advance for your feedback, which will help us improve the quality of our projects and their positive impact for volunteers and communities.
In order to provide a thoughtful analysis and take into consideration important variables, we would like you to answer a few questions that will allow us to guarantee academic relevance and accuracy while preserving your privacy. The information gathered will be used purely and exclusively for the purpose of this researchand personal data will not be shared with third parties. Consolidated results and analysis from the survey will always be communicated in anonymous form to the researchers involved and to the public, and you will be able toaccess and modify your personal information at any time by contacting your sending and/or hosting organisation.

1. Nationality

2. Date of birth (year)

3. Gender

4. Current occupation (main)

5. Level of formal education (latest attended/obtained)

6. Major field of studies

7. Country where your project takes place

8. Project theme (main)

9. Project duration (please indicate the total number of days including arrival and departure)

10. Did you take part in a pre-departure orientation/training before your project?

11. Have you already volunteered before?

12. Have you already been abroad?

If yes, how many weeks did you spend abroad in total (1 year = 52 weeks)?

13. What are the three words that best describe your motivation to join this project?

My motivation 1
My motivation 2
My motivation 3

14. In the last two months, have you...	Yes	No
..spent some time doing volunteer work for a social/civic/non- governmental organisation or helping other people outside your family without being paid	◯	◯
...spent some time on activities promoting international peace and/or solidarity	◯	◯
..spent some time on activities promoting Human Rights (e.g. Rights of minorities, Rights of migrants and refugees, Rights on gender, body and sexuality, Rights to Healthy Life and Housing, etc.)	◯	◯
...spent some time on activities promoting Climate Justice and sustainable living (e.g. Climate change awareness, protection of ecosystems, water and soil management, food production, bio- construction, etc.)	◯	◯

15. In the next six months, do you plan to...	Yes	No
...spend some time doing volunteer work for a social/civic/ non- governmental organisation or helping other people outside your family without being paid	◯	◯
...spent some time on activities promoting international peace and/or solidarity	◯	◯
..spent some time on activities promoting Human Rights (e.g. Rights of minorities, Rights of migrants and refugees, Rights on gender, body and sexuality, Rights to Healthy Life and Housing, etc.)	◯	◯
...spent some time on activities promoting Climate Justice and sustainable living (e.g. Climate change awareness, protection of ecosystems, water and soil management, food production, bio- construction, etc.)	◯	◯

16. What distance did you travel to reach your project from your usual place of residence (approximate number of kilometres, one way)?

17. Which of the following was your main transportation to the project (the one used to cover the longest distance of your trip)?

Walking / Bicycle	Car	Bus / Tramway	Rail (Train, Subway,)	Boat	Airplane
◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

18. Contact (e-mail). This information is only used for verification purposes (tracking responses before/after).

19. Imagine an eleven-rung ladder where the bottom (0) represents the worst possible life for you and the top (10) represents the best possible life for you. On which step of the ladder do you feel you personally stand at the present time?

20. A1. In general...

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel I can travel by myself	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I feel able and confident to deal with my professional life and institutional bureaucracy (apply for a job offer, taxes, insurances,...)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I like taking initiative	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I like to reach my objectives and to finish what I start	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I feel I can stay focused on my work	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

21. A2. Usually...

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I become tense if I have to talk about myself or my feelings	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I tense up if I meet an acquaintance in the street	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I am nervous mixing with people I don't know well	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
When mixing in a group, I find myself worrying I will be ignored	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I am tense mixing in a group	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

22.A3. Generallyspeaking...

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel that I live in a diverse society	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I feel that I live in an inclusive society	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I feel well integrated in the society where I live	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Whenever I have an important problem, I know people I can trust and will help me honestly	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

23. A5. Usually...

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I tell others what I need or feel	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I tell others when they make me feel uncomfortable	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I expect others to know what my feelings or needs are	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

24. A6. When I encounter problems I usually:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Get upset or depressed	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Feel very unprepared	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Find some alternatives and help to change the situation	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Understand them as opportunities that will improve my life and myself	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

25. A7. Generally speaking...

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am confident taking part in debates and discussions	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I can easily accept new responsibilities when the job demands it	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I feel I can integrate in a group	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I feel I can be a part of a team : to work, to play, to cooperate	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I think I have some work-related skills (such as using tools or techniques, working with my hands, team work, etc.)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

26. A8. Usually...

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am afraid of conflicts and find it difficult to deal with them	○	○	○	○	○
When confronting a potential conflict with other people, I tend to feel uncomfortable	○	○	○	○	○
When confronting a potential conflict with other people, I tend to either try to avoid any situation that could lead to a disagreement, or to just remain silent	○	○	○	○	○

27. A9. In general...

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am aware of my best abilities	○	○	○	○	○
I am aware of my weakest points	○	○	○	○	○

28. B1. Usually...

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I like to meet people from other cultures	○	○	○	○	○
I'm open when it comes to interacting with other cultures including religion, economy, etc.	○	○	○	○	○
I think I have a good level of understanding of people with different societal and cultural backgrounds	○	○	○	○	○
I respect people who hold different values, heritage and identity than my own	○	○	○	○	○
I am motivated to learn about cultures and habits of people in my own country and abroad	○	○	○	○	○
I am aware of my own culture and identity	○	○	○	○	○

29. B2. Currently...

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel able to communicate in a foreign language	○	○	○	○	○
I feel able to communicate with people from different countries and cultures, even if we do not speak the same language	○	○	○	○	○
I would like to improve my knowledge of foreign languages	○	○	○	○	○
I would like to learn a new language Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○

30. C1. I believe that I have a good understanding of...

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
...the Peace movement and its actions	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
...the International Voluntary Service movement and its actions	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
..the Universal Declaration of Human Rights	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
...the Rights of Migrants and Refugees	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
..the Rights on Gender, Body and Sexuality	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
...the Rights to Healthy Life and Housing	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
...Water and Land Rights	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
...Global warming and Climate Change	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
...Sustainable food production	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
...Bio-construction and earth building	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
...Carbon Offsets actions	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
...the Sustainable Development Goals	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

31. C2. In my daily life, I feel personally responsible to...

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
..actively engage for the construction of Peace and the creation of inclusive societies	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
...actively engage for Human Rights Education and the respect of Human Rights all over the world	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
...actively engage to address and mitigate the consequences of Climate Change and promote Climate Justice	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
...actively engage for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
...Bio-construction and earth building	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
...Carbon Offsets actions	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
...the Sustainable Development Goals	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

32. C3. I believe that International Voluntary Service can...

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
..contribute to the construction of Peace and the creation of inclusive societies	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
...contribute to Human Rights Education and the respect of Human Rights all over the world	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
...contribute to address and mitigate the consequences of Climate Change and promote Climate Justice	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
..contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

33. C.4 According to the United Nations, «The Sustainable Development Goals are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges we face, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, and peace and justice». While all the Goals are interconnected, which of the Goals do you consider to be the most important priority at the global level? (choose up to 3 Goals)

Goal n.1 - No Poverty
Goal n.2 - Zero Hunger
Goal n.3 - Good Health and Well-Being
Goal n.4 - Quality Education
Goal n.5 - Gender Equality
Goal n.6 - Clean Water and Sanitation
Goal n.7 - Affordable and Clean Energy
Goal n.8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth
Goal n.9 - Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
Goal n.10 - Reduced Inequalities
Goal n.11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities
Goal n.12 - Responsible Production and Consumptio
Goal n.13 - Climate Action
Goal n.14 - Life Below Water
Goal n.15 - Life on Land
Goal n.16 - Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
Goal n.17 - Partnerships for the Goals

34. C5. I feel that...

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
In most ways my life is close to my ideal	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
The conditions of my life are excellent.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I am satisfied with my life.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

APPENDIX E

Interview guiding questions

Demographic Data

Location of the project
Type of location (rural/urban/sub-urban)
Name
Nationality
Age
Gender
Occupation and role in the community
What Project/work here? For how many years has this project been implemented?
Your role/relation in/with the project?

I. Starting the interview (QUESTIONS TO SITUATE AND make your interviewed feel AT EASE)

Hosting International Volunteers

1. When did you host the first international volunteer(s)? a) Year: b) How many international volunteers you hosted?
2. What was your "initial" motivation to host international volunteers?
3. What are the challenges faced in hosting international volunteers? How were you able to deal with those challenges? Please give concrete examples.
4. How does the presence of international volunteers influence the relationship between different local community stakeholders (authorities, sponsors, local government, media, etc)?

II. Questions about how the IVS project touches/ has an outcome on/for the local community

5. What do you think about the project? (what's your general opinion, the stronger points, the challenges)
6. How do you think the project has an impact on the community members? → Can you share any examples of impact this project has had on the community members? / has the project brought any changes to the community? (Changes in daily routine, lifestyle, intercultural exchange, technical skills...)

More in depth:

- 6a. as the project produced any change on the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour of the local community?
- 6b. any change regarding the outlook/perceptions of members of the local community with reference to people with different origins/cultures
- 6c. any change regarding the outlook/perceptions of members of the local community

with reference to their own community

6d. did members of your community participate in THIS PROJECT? (in which ways?) can you share any examples?

6e. did members of your community participate IN ANY OTHER international programmes as a result of this project?

6f. do voluntary service projects contribute to any crucial challenges of your community? (which ones, how?)

7. What is the technical result of the volunteers' work? In a single project /As a result of the several projects of last years (if it is the case)

8. According to your perspectives, what are the (positive and negative) impacts on:

8a. Environment and sustainability (improvement by the work done; effect of their presence, raising awareness on environmental issues, long term actions, three levels of sustainability; social, economic, environmental)

8b. Heritage and cultural diversity (renovation/ awareness raising heritage; any effect on intercultural relations?; with local non-autochthonous community?)

8c. Human rights and peace (more information on peace and human rights, different vision of this area, relations between different people different backgrounds)

8d. Social inclusion and active participation (gender and equality/ greater participation of people in activities, in interest in activities, skills for personal development)

8e. Poverty reduction and health promotion (greater awareness on; food sovereignty (the right of people to define their own food systems)/ HIV AIDS, healthy/clean environment to live in, new skills for professional development)

8f. Local economy (examples: spend money in village, more visits to heritage by ...; regional investment; jobs supporting project life,...)

Final Questions

9. Did any new initiatives start in the community influenced by the camp?

Conflict management

10. Did the camp bring any conflict? How was it managed and with which result

11. Did this affect on the way people approaches conflicts in your community?

12. What's the most significant change this project brought?

13. What is your suggestion for the improvement of the project in the future?

Eg: What are the things that the local community can do to support the IVS project? What can the IVS organisation do to support the local community?