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## WWOOFers in Norway – who are they?

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### ABSTRACT

Some travellers “want to make a difference” and develop themselves while exploring the world through programmes offered by international volunteer organisations, such as the WWOOF initiative (WorldWide Opportunities on Organic Farms). This international network promotes organic farming and sustainable lifestyles by connecting hosts and volunteers who are willing to work for hosts in exchange for food, accommodation, and insight into organic farming. However, who are these WWOOFers? While researched mainly by qualitative studies in other countries (e.g. Australia, Hawaii, Japan, U.S.A.), this is the first cross-sectional study of WWOOFers in Europe. Data was collected by online questionnaires to WWOOFers registered at WWOOF Norway ( $n = 1184$ ; response rate = 85%). These WWOOFers come from 77 countries, among which U.S.A., Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands dominates. They are mainly young, well-educated, well-travelled, urban people wanting to explore rural living. Some, but not all report lifestyles and behavioural intentions in line with the WWOOF philosophy. Age and gender differences apply. Through factor analyses, the study identified seven personal characteristics, including, in descending order Empathy, Goal-orientation, Outgoing, Reserved, Recognition seeking, Child-oriented, and Egoistic-materialistic. The study expands the current insights and partly contradicting previous research.

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WWOOFing; volunteer tourism; organic farming; personal characteristics; Norway

## Introduction

An increasing number of travellers “want to make a difference” and develop themselves while exploring the world (Curtin & Brown, 2019; Han et al., 2019) as evidenced by the growing memberships of a diverse array of international volunteer organisations and networks, such as WWOOF (Terry, 2014). This study aims at exploring the profiles of the WWOOFers volunteering with their hosts in Norway. In short, *WWOOF is a worldwide movement and network linking volunteers with organic farmers and growers to promote cultural and educational experiences based on trust and non-monetary exchange, thereby helping to build a sustainable, global community*. It consists of two main subsystems: the hosts and the WWOOFers. Hosts have a farm or other facility at which they can provide

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WWOOFers with a place to work, accommodation, and normally three meals a day (Burns & Kondo, 2015). A simple national level “umbrella organisation” connects the two subsystems, and the international network relates across nations.

This study conceives of WWOOFing as a unique kind of volunteer tourism (Wearing et al., 2016) where travelling with a purpose of learning (Curtin & Brown, 2019) and a vision of ethical change (Crossley, 2019) is the assumed dominant driving force. The research questions are: Who are these northbound WWOOFers, what are their personal characteristics, and what are their travel and WWOOFing careers? To what extent are they involved in other kinds of volunteering, how do they spend their leisure time, and to what extent are they committed to the roots of the WWOOFing philosophy, and then assumedly interested in sustainability and organic farming?

Most of the volunteer tourism occurs in Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Knollenberg et al., 2014; Mintel, 2014) while WWOOFing stands out by occurring in developed countries and across the northern hemisphere. Extant research on WWOOFing have been conducted in New Zealand (Kosnik, 2014; McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006; McIntosh & Campbell, 2001), Australia (Deville et al., 2016a, 2016b), Argentina (Miller & Mair, 2014; 2015), Hawaii (Mostafanezhad, 2016), South Korea (Choo & Jamal, 2009), U.S.A. (Maycock, 2008; Terry, 2014; Yamamoto & Engelsted, 2014), Canada (Lans, 2016), and Japan (Burns & Kondo, 2015). However, to the best of our knowledge, there is only one peer-reviewed research article published on WWOOFers in a European context (Kosnik, 2014); it deals with Austria and relies on qualitative approaches.

Qualitative approaches have dominated the scarce research on WWOOFing albeit expanded our understanding about the phenomenon (Burns & Kondo, 2015; McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006; Mostafanezhad, 2016). The present quantitative cross-sectional study is based on data from 1,184 out of 1,251 persons registered with WWOOF in Norway. It is the first published quantitative study in Europe and one of the few published quantitative studies of WWOOFing worldwide. Overall, the present study contributes to the knowledge about volunteer tourism development through focusing on an under-researched topic in a new geographical area; climatically and culturally different from those studied before. It employs a quantitative method and provides new insights in WWOOFers' personal characteristics, interests, daily activities, and engagement in voluntary work, which is lacking in extant research.

## WWOOF, WWOOFing, and WWOOFers

The WWOOF movement originated in 1971 in Britain as a reflection of the “Back to the Land Movement” and under the label “Working Weekends on Organic Farms” (Yamamoto & Engelsted, 2014). Sue Coppard, a secretary in London, brought up the idea to offer short (weekend) stays for working people on farms in the English countryside, where local organic farmers might get help in return for food and accommodation (Maycock, 2008). Over the years, WWOOF has grown from a weekend escape to an international movement providing people with the ability to combine travelling, volunteering, and sharing sustainable agricultural practices with likeminded peers. From the modest start in England, WWOOF has developed to 61 national organisations that share a common philosophy of promoting the organic food movement. As of 2017, it includes eight national organisations in Africa, 13 in America, 13 in Asia-Pacific, 26 in Europe, and two in the Middle East.

Additionally, 84 other countries are listed as WWOOF Independents (<http://www.woofinternational.org/>). The growth seems attributable to the rise of the sustainable food movement and to the increasing popularity of volunteer tourism (Terry, 2014). Today, WWOOFing qualifies as an example of the most authentic farm tourism experience (Philip et al., 2010).

The acronym WWOOF has stayed unchanged, while its meaning has been modified twice, reflecting organisational expansion, critical issues related to work and immigration, and the renegotiation of its aims, values, and ambitions. The name was changed to "Willing Workers on Organic Farms" (Deville et al., 2016b; McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006), and changed again to "Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms", to avoid being associated with migrant workers (Börjars, 2012; Terry, 2014),<sup>1</sup> which caused misunderstandings of its purpose and practice.

The philosophy of WWOOF developed as a moral ideal, incorporating values of environmentalism, sustainability, and social justice (Kosnik, 2013; Tomlinson, 2008). However, the increasing popularity of WWOOFing "may critically undermine the original WWOOF ethic" (Deville et al., 2016a, p. 426). The processes of commodification of WWOOFing within the tourism industry attracts travellers looking for a cheap holiday, improving language skills, and to enjoy the home comfort of the hosts rather than for organic volunteering opportunities. Problems arise for hosts when the touristic motivations begin to outweigh those of work (Terry, 2014). Thus, WWOOFing seems to exist in the tension between two different meta-motivations as seen in voluntary tourism in general. The predominantly "volunteer-minded" individuals tend to devote most of their stay to volunteer activities at the destination, while the predominantly "vacation-minded" tend towards seeing the trip as a vacation, where a smaller part of the time is dedicated to voluntary activities (Brown & Morrison, 2003; Tukamushaba et al., 2017).

Joining WWOOF is a simple, inexpensive process with few formal rules of engagement (Deville, 2011). Through the Internet sites, WWOOFers pay a small fee to the WWOOF organisation in the country they want to visit, which then allows them to access the web-page of the local WWOOF organisation in order to find a host farm that suits their likes and needs (Miller & Mair, 2014; 2015). WWOOF does normally not screen the host farms or the volunteers, although visits to host farms are common for some national WWOOF organisations. WWOOFing is highly inclusive, as it is open to all ages and nationalities (Deville, 2011).

WWOOFing in Norway has existed informally for more than a decade and the national WWOOF organisation (WWOOF Norway) was established in 2013. As of September 2017, WWOOF Norway has 151 farms (WWOOF hosts) and 1251 paying members (WWOOFers) (WWOOF Norway, 2017).<sup>2</sup> A new Norwegian WWOOF webpage was launched in 2014 and further developed in 2028, which is the clearinghouse and meeting point between the farms and the WWOOFers. It includes a review section, where WWOOFers can express their (dis-)content with the hosts and vice versa, although the reviews are only visible to members.

### Learning from Austrian and non-European research on WWOOFing

The academic research on WWOOFing is still in its infancy, fragmented, dominated by "grey literature", and a few published scientific articles and studies (Miller & Mair, 2014; 2015). Several approaches have been used, such as triangulation (Deville et al., 2016a,

2016b; McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006; Yamamoto & Engelsted, 2014) and inductive and grounded theory approaches (Deville et al., 2016a, 2016b; Kosnik, 2014; Mostafanezhad, 2016). Studies of WWOOF hosts have been published by McIntosh and Campbell (2001), Yamamoto and Engelsted (2014), Kosnik (2014), Mostafanezhad (2016), Terry (2014), and Deville et al. (2016a, 2016b).

The peer-reviewed scholarly research on WWOOFing can roughly be placed within four partially overlapping and interlinked perspectives. They are: (a) *WWOOFing as a new or alternative social movement* (Burns & Kondo, 2015; Lans, 2016; Mostafanezhad, 2016); (b) *as de-commodification of tourism* (Deville, 2011; Deville et al., 2016a, 2016b; Miller & Mair, 2014; 2015; Singh, 2001); (c) *WWOOFers as significant and multiple contributions to the maintenance of small-scale and organic farming* (Ekers et al., 2016; Mostafanezhad et al., 2015; Terry, 2014); and (d) *mapping of profiles, motivations and outcomes of WWOOF hosts and/or WWOOFers* (Deville et al., 2016b; McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006; McIntosh & Campbell, 2001; Yamamoto & Engelsted, 2014). Both (a) and (b) deal with aspects of commodification, but while (b) focuses on WWOOFing as a de-commodification of mass tourism, (a) sees WWOOFing as part of a countermovement that opposes the structures and consequences of the free market forces and neoliberalism. Interlinked in the papers are discussions related to lifestyle entrepreneurship and rural development.

Burns and Kondo (2015) suggested that WWOOF in Japan is facilitating *new nationwide social movements*. It is a bottom-up approach to development created by the people for the people and is free of government dependency. Lans (2016) argued that in Canada, WWOOFing is part of the caring economy, defined as an economy at the service of human beings, and not human beings at the service of the economy. The WWOOF programme provides farmers with inexpensive labour, formerly provided by the large farm families. It facilitates production of the cheap food that the policy makers have promised consumers. The care economy is not appreciated in a capitalist and neoliberal market, and exploitation and misuse of programmes such as WWOOF from both hosts and workers might be the result.

Mostafanezhad (2016) studied the motivations of WWOOF hosts and found that the hosts tend to articulate their motivations within *broader protective counter-movements against neoliberalism and the commodification and disembedding of fictitious commodities from the market*. This loosely articulated organic identity is concentrated around three corollary protective counter-movements that align with *organic food production and consumption, spirituality, and alternative education*.

Yamamoto and Engelsted (2014) analysed WWOOF in the U.S. as a form of agricultural or volunteer tourism. They found that *WWOOF host distributions were highly skewed spatially* and suggested that lifestyle considerations are important factors in such respect. WWOOF hosts are typically located in high environmental/scenic quality locations and “bohemian” cultural settings, and that few are found in the more conventional farm regions. WWOOF thrives on the margins of dominant modern agriculture and is not likely to transform “conventional” rural agricultural areas or the practices associated within them. Their study also revealed *potential conflicts between the motivations of WWOOF hosts and guests*. Access to cheap and flexible labour is a major reason for the hosts’ involvement with WWOOF, but the hosts felt that the WWOOFers often have unrealistic expectations towards the experience and do not necessarily have the skills needed for the farm work.

In line with some of the findings of Yamamoto and Engelsted (2014), Deville et al. (2016a) discussed how WWOOF is *increasingly exposed to processes of commodification*, as it is perceived to facilitate an alternative tourism experience. This might undermine the more traditional organic farming experience and space. As more and more travellers are attracted to WWOOFing, they are tending to overlook the ideals of organic farming and its sustainability ethics, and are instead seeing it as a means to travel cheaply, to avoid the beaten path of mass tourism, and to have more authentic tourism experiences by engaging with local people and the environment. This has led to the collision of two separate and independent spaces: the idealistic and ethical space represented by WWOOF and the commodified and capitalistic space represented by mass tourism. Miller and Mair (2014) applied a more positive approach, as they saw organic volunteering as a form of decommodified tourism that leads to positive attitudes and which can influence the WWOOFers so that they, for instance can become more active citizens or political activists in the future.

Kosnik (2014) analysed the nature of the alternative hospitality encounters of “work for food and accommodation”. The study brought new insights into the host–guest relationship by illustrating the immersion of the guests into the domestic – social as well as economic – unit of the host household, and how the sharing of accommodation, food, and drink, among other substances, is an essential part of negotiating a complex socio-economic relationship between hosts and guests.

Miller and Mair (2015) explored the experiences of WWOOFers in Argentina and argue that opening to living in interconnectedness emerged as the essential understanding of the organic volunteering phenomenon. This finding allowed for the development of a framework for the meaning attached to the WWOOF experience and underlying substances in the following manner: (1) building bonds: experiencing human connections; (2) exchanging knowledge: experience learning, teaching and sharing; (3) experiencing harmony: being in touch with nature; and (4) consciousness-raising experiences: creating awareness for future activism.

Research focusing on *WOOFing as part of a solution to the agrarian question* (Ekers et al., 2016) shows how WWOOFing may include emotional support, talents as serendipity, labour recruitment facilitation, and, in line with Lans (2016), reduced labour costs for the farmers and their social environment. Thus, WWOOFing may be a tool that aids the development of sustainable regional food systems by supporting changes on farms and in local communities, and sustainable food movements (Terry, 2014). Although agreeing in the effect of labour supply on maintenance of organic farming, Mostafanezhad et al. (2015) points to limitations of such efforts. Additionally, Ekers et al. (2016) show that volunteers’ contributions are driven by the poor economy of the farms, but also on non-institutional farmer training, the pursuit of sustainability, and social movement building.

Only two of the reviewed studies reported *data on the profiles and characteristics* of WWOOFers. McIntosh and Bonnemann (2006) outlined the *demographic profile* of the applicant WWOOFers in New Zealand using information from 2231 applicant forms in 2001 and found that that 94% were international, with the largest proportions of applicants from Europe (52%), North America (22%) and East Asia (12%). Applicants predominantly originated from the U.S. (17%), Germany (18%), the U.K. (17%), and Japan (10%). The average age of applicants was 26.7 years with the age group 16–24 years accounting for 51% and 87% were less than 35 years of age. Thus, the group resembles more the profile of backpackers in New Zealand than rural tourists do. Among the applicants, 62% were

female, which indicated that women are more attracted to undertaking voluntary work and staying with a host family when travelling in New Zealand. Moreover, 69% were planning to go WWOOFing alone, 69% were single, and 92% had no previous WWOOF experience. Students constituted the largest professional group (43%), followed by professional (17%), semi-professional/skilled (13%), semi-skilled/non-manual (12%), and manual labour (9%). Finally, people involved in WWOOF tended to have experiences of rural living or stays and organic farming or growth.

In his study of WWOOFers in Australia ( $n = 188$ ), Deville et al. (2016b) found that WWOOFers ranged in age from 17–65 years, but that 50% were between the ages of 19–24 and 73% aged 28 or younger. More than two-thirds were female, thus sustaining the findings of McIntosh and Bonnemann (2006). Almost 75% of WWOOFers were not in steady relationships, and that the 25% of WWOOFers who were married or partnered were generally older than the single ones. The WWOOFers represented 24 countries of residence. Among these, 67% of the WWOOFers came from just five countries: Germany (24%), South Korea (14%), U.K. (12%), Japan (9%), and Australia (8%). Moreover, 96% came from 12 of the 24 countries mentioned. The WWOOFers were largely urban inhabitants, with 43% living in cities, 31% living in towns, and only 27% living in villages and rural regions. They were a highly educated group; 78% of the participants were college or university trained. In terms of occupation, Twenty-eight percent were students, 31% employed full-time, 18% employed part-time, and 15% were seeking paid work. Fifty-two percent had heard about WWOOFing through “word of mouth”, 16% through “ads/references in guidebooks, articles, hostels, and pamphlets”, 16% through “Internet searches/links”, 14% through “other forums, associations, travel agents, and travel related groups”, and 2% through “other”. Moreover, as compared to Van Rader’s (1994) study of backpackers, Deville (2011) found that WWOOFers, to a lesser extent, had Australia recommended by others as a destination, and they were less interested in seeing tourist attractions and relaxing as travellers, but were more motivated to discover cultural differences and conceived of their travel as an “escape”.

To summarise, only the studies of Deville et al. (2016b) and McIntosh and Bonnemann (2006) employed quantitative approaches and focused on WWOOFers’ personal characteristics, their travel and WWOOFing careers, and to what extent they are interested in sustainability and organic farming. However, the Deville et al. (2016b) study is based on a small sample in Australia and applied data from 2006–2009. McIntosh and Bonnemann (2006) applied New Zealand population data with a high number of respondents but dating back to 2001. Norway is located almost as far as one can come from Australia and New Zealand and have other international relationships. The time that has elapsed between the previous studies and the present one and the distances in geography, economy, climate, culture, traditions, and demography make it reasonable to expect that the present study will contribute with new knowledge to the field while supporting some conclusions from the above studies. An expected conclusion from this study is that the geography, history and demography of WWOOF should be developed as new and integrated research streams.

## Method

In September 2016, the entire population of registered WWOOFers in Norway received a survey (by Questback) from the Norwegian WWOOF organisation. Using Dillman’s (2000)



method, reminders were sent after three weeks and after five weeks. A travel grant of 1000 euro and five WWOOF Norway t-shirts and bags were at stake as a trigger to raise the response rate. The final sample includes 1184 respondents from 92 different countries from around the world, which represents 85% of the members registered in WWOOF Norway.

A structured questionnaire was developed based on two sources: First, eight qualitative interviews were conducted with WWOOFers at an organic farm in South-East Norway during 2014–2015 to identify themes to be included in the questionnaire. Some themes surfaced that were not reported in the published literature on WWOOFing as referenced above.

To describe the Norwegian WWOOF population, the questionnaire used for this study included a few open questions that focus on respondents' country of residence and current place of living. For the same purpose, questions with fixed response alternatives focused on gender, age, relationship to paid work, yearly income, level of education, partner relationships, place of living, ways of learning about WWOOF, seniority as WWOOF members, and "WWOOFing careers". To address the respondents' engagement with ecological-friendly behaviour, sustainability, organic farming and volunteering, questions with fixed alternatives probed respondents' lifestyles, including travel careers (see Table 2), experience with farming, participation in voluntary work, the role of sustainability in their lives (such as their preferred way of living, see items in Table 1), organic shopping practices, and environmental engagement. Similar questions queried which leisure time activities they practised (see items in Table 3). Finally, a list of personal characteristics was presented with items probing values favouring altruism versus egoism and self-perception (de Groot & Steg, 2008; Horner & Swarbrooke, 2016), using seven-point Likert-type scales.

Data were analysed by SPSS21. First, univariate analyses were conducted through frequency analyses, mean values, and standard deviation to examine demographic profiles of the respondents. Second, bivariate analyses were conducted using cross-tabulations with  $\chi^2$  test and contingency coefficient to explore relationships between age, gender, education, and WWOOFing career on one hand, and the remaining nominal and ordinal profile variables on the other, accepting  $p$ -values below .05 as significant. For the personal characteristics, an exploratory factor analysis was chosen to reveal possible underlying dimensions, applying Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation and pairwise exclusion of missing values, and including variables with eigenvalue  $> 1$ . Items with factor loadings  $< 0.5$  and items that loaded on more than one factor with a difference in factor loadings of less than 0.2 were also eliminated. Finally, Cronbach's alpha was applied to test the reliability of the factor-based sum-scores.

**Table 1.** "I would in my everyday life at home like ..." ( $n = 1184$ ) (horizontal percent of sample).

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Total
To have a more sustainable lifestyle	<b>92.4</b>	5.2	2.5	100
To spend more time in the outdoors	<b>93.7</b>	4.1	2.4	100
To live in the countryside	<b>82.1</b>	10.7	7.2	100
To have an organic farm	<b>72.6</b>	13.4	1.4	100
To have less stress and a slower life	<b>79.8</b>	10.4	9.7	100
To live in the city	<b>33.5</b>	20.9	45.6	100



**Table 2.** Conceptualisation of what travelling means to WWOOFers and how and where they prefer to travel (percent of sample,  $n = 1184$ ) (horizontal percent of sample).

Questions	Strongly agree	Agree	Partly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Partly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
I see travelling as an important part of my life	<b>67.3</b>	<b>23.8</b>	7.4	.9	.3	.3	0	100
I always look for new adventures when I travel	<b>53.0</b>	<b>31.6</b>	12.8	1.9	.5	.3	.1	100
I prefer to travel to places I have never visited before	<b>35.5</b>	<b>32.1</b>	21.2	8.1	2.0	.7	.4	100
I would not travel to an unknown destination	2.3	5.2	8.0	8.4	15.8	<b>35.7</b>	<b>24.7</b>	100
I prefer to travel to typical tourist destinations	1.8	2.2	11.1	15.9	<b>25.9</b>	<b>27.6</b>	15.5	100
I prefer to know as much as possible about the place I am going before leaving	11.7	<b>19.7</b>	<b>32.2</b>	16.7	12.3	6.3	1.1	100
I prefer to travel with my family	2.4	4.6	11.9	<b>28.1</b>	19.5	<b>23.1</b>	10.3	100
I prefer to travel alone	9.3	21.2	<b>26.5</b>	<b>22.6</b>	10.6	6.9	2.9	100
I prefer to travel with friends	9.4	<b>29.6</b>	<b>32.3</b>	20.7	4.6	2.8	.7	100
I like to interact with other tourists when I travel	17.5	<b>32.9</b>	<b>27.8</b>	11.8	6.1	2.9	1.0	100

Note: Bold values indicate the two highest value for each variable.

**Table 3.** Leisure time activities ( $n = 1184$ ) (horizontal percent of sample).

	Very often	Often	Rather often	Sometimes	Rather seldom	Seldom	Never	Total
Read	<b>27.6</b>	<b>29.9</b>	18.5	18.2	3.2	2.0	.5	100
See a film	14.7	<b>25.6</b>	20.4	<b>25.1</b>	7.4	5.6	1.2	100
Be on computer	15.2	<b>28.0</b>	<b>23.8</b>	20.8	6.7	5.0	.6	100
Do sports	18.1	<b>28.3</b>	20.8	<b>21.5</b>	5.7	4.5	1.2	100
Hang out with friends	<b>22.6</b>	<b>30.7</b>	20.7	20.3	3.2	2.4	.3	100
Be with my family	13.4	<b>26.4</b>	<b>23.9</b>	<b>24.0</b>	6.8	4.9	.6	100
Relax	21.2	<b>28.8</b>	<b>23.0</b>	20.2	4.3	2.1	.4	100

## Findings

### *Demographics of WWOOFers and WWOOF profile*

Most of the respondents were female (58.2%), almost equally distributed between those studying (38%) and those working, either full-time (25%) or part-time (12%). The WWOOFers were young; 69% were between 20 and 29 years of age, 17% between 30 and 39 years, 4.6% between 40 and 49, and 2.6% were more than 50 years of age. Over half of them had an income of less than €14,000 on a yearly basis (29% of them had less than €6,000; 13% had between €6,001 and €10,000, 9% had between €10,001 and €14,000), and 13% were sustained by their parents. The majority (61%) were single, 29% were in a relationship, and among these, 7% were married and 1.3% engaged. Twenty-six percent lived with friends, 21% with a partner, 24% alone, and 22% lived with their parents. Eight percent currently had no permanent place to live and, to a higher extent than the others, these WWOOFers were “travelling the world” ( $X^2 = 258.338$ ;  $df = 28$ ,  $p < .000$ ).

The WWOOFers were well educated. Most of them (81%) had a university degree, among whom 35% with lower and 46% with higher degrees. A majority (60%) lived

in urban areas and 40% in a small city (20,000-100,000) or in the countryside (less than 20,000 people). Moreover, they represented 83 nationalities and were mainly residents of countries outside of Norway. They held citizenships in nations such as U.S.A. (19%), Germany (13%), France (11%), Italy (5%), Spain (4%), or the Netherlands (4%), and the remaining 44% were spread over 77 other nations. Their profile as WWOOF members indicated two main types: new members (28% enrolled as members less than a year ago) and the experienced (37% had been members for 2–3 years, and 13% had been members for more than 3 years). Age and membership were related – the older WWOOFers tended to be more senior members ( $X^2 = 191.569$ ;  $df = 15$ ,  $p < .000$ ;  $cc = 37$ ;  $p < .000$ ).

Information about WWOOF was disseminated informally by word of mouth (58%), as 47% of the WWOOFers claim to have met information about the phenomenon through their friends, through “people met during other travels” (additionally 8%) or through parents (additionally 3%). The second most important source of information was the Internet (34%). Finally, Facebook was of limited importance (1%). Seven responded “other sources” to this question.

A significant proportion of the WWOOF Norway members (28%) had not yet WWOOFed, while 36% had WWOOFed once; 15% twice and 20% had WWOOFed more than three times. Older WWOOFers reported higher frequencies of WWOOFing as compared to the younger ones ( $X^2 = 53.253$ ;  $df = 12$ ,  $p < .000$ ;  $cc = 24$ ;  $p < .000$ ). Frequencies of travelling abroad were positively related to how often they had WWOOFed ( $X^2 = 97.77$ ;  $df = 20$ ,  $p < .000$ ;  $cc = 28$ ;  $p < .000$ ). Logically, WWOOFing travel careers related to WWOOF membership seniority ( $X^2 = 328.89$ ;  $df = 20$ ,  $p < .000$ ;  $cc = 0.47$ ;  $p < .000$ ). Among those who had WWOOFed, 64% had WWOOFed in only one country and 20% had WWOOFed in two countries. Most of the “experienced” WWOOFers in this study had WWOOFed in Norway (84%), while many had also WWOOFed in Sweden (7%), France (6.3%), Italy (6%), Ireland (5%), Spain (4.5%), and England (4%).

### **Voluntary experience and sustainable lifestyle**

Most (64%) of the WWOOFers were not members of voluntary organisations other than WWOOF. Seventeen percent were members of an environmental organisation, 13% of a charity organisation, and 7% were members of other types of voluntary organisations. Younger WWOOFers were more often members of other voluntary organisations as compared to older ones ( $X^2 = 26.331$ ;  $df = 9$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $cc = 0.15$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Most of the WWOOFers (67%) had no experience with farming, while 33% had a farm or former farm experience. In terms of age, the older WWOOFers were more experienced with farming than the younger ones ( $X^2 = 14.036$ ;  $df = 3$ ,  $p < .003$ ;  $cc = 0.11$ ;  $p < .003$ ).

Almost all WWOOFers claimed to be consumers of organic products back home; however, only eight percent said they always bought organic products when shopping, 35% said they did it often, and 25% quite often. When asked how they would like their everyday life to be, the vast majority would like to spend more time in the outdoors, develop a more sustainable lifestyle, live in the countryside, and have an organic farm (Table 1). There were no significant differences by gender, age, education, or WWOOF member seniority, but there was a significant correlation with those coming from a farm or having former farm experience ( $X^2 = 21.070$ ;  $df = 4$ ,  $p < .000$ ;  $cc = 0.14$ ;  $p < .000$ ).

### Travel and WWOOFing careers

Fifty-seven per cent of the WWOOFers had travelled abroad four or more times over the last three years, while 3% had not travelled abroad at all. Gender and age were related to travel careers. Women made more international travels (one or two international journeys) than the men did ( $X^2 = 29.900$ ;  $df = 5$ ,  $p < .000$ ;  $cc = 16$ ;  $p < .000$ ). Older WWOOFers had travelled more ( $X^2 = 85.620$ ;  $df = 15$ ,  $p < .000$ ;  $cc = 26$ ;  $p < .000$ ) and had visited more countries ( $X^2 = 53.253$ ;  $df = 12$ ,  $p < .000$ ;  $cc = 24$ ;  $p < .000$ ) than the younger ones.

Table 2 displays meanings attributed to travel by the WWOOFers. It appeared that WWOOFers have what we could call adventurous travel spirits. Almost all considered travelling to be an important activity in their lives. When travelling, most were looking for new adventures, including journeys to destinations unknown to them. Furthermore, WWOOFers did not want to visit typical tourist destinations. Older WWOOFers in particular, preferred to go to destinations they did not know ( $X^2 = 57.965$ ;  $df = 18$ ,  $p < .000$ ;  $cc = 22$ ;  $p < .000$ ). Men preferred more typical tourist destinations ( $X^2 = 21.838$ ;  $df = 6$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $cc = 14$ ;  $p < .001$ ) as compared to women. The majority preferred to learn more about the destination before visiting it, and this applied especially to older WWOOFers ( $X^2 = 39.913$ ;  $df = 18$ ,  $p < .003$ ;  $cc = 18$ ;  $p < .003$ ).

WWOOFers considered the contact with local people as an important part of their travelling experience. They preferred to travel with friends or alone, and few preferred to travel with their family. Analysed by age, older WWOOFers preferred to travel with their family ( $X^2 = 63.995$ ;  $df = 18$ ,  $p < .000$ ;  $cc = 23$ ;  $p < .000$ ). Cross-tabulations showed that the conceptualisation of the meanings of travel (Table 1) were unrelated to how often they travelled, education, gender, and WWOOF member seniority ( $X^2$  test  $p \geq .05$ ).

### Leisure profile

The WWOOFers reported involvement across a broad range of leisure activities, and they mainly appear as socially and physically active (Table 3). Mostly, the WWOOFers liked to read, hang out with friends, and relax. Furthermore, they also liked to be on the computer, do sports, be with their family, and see a film. Cross-tabulations with the  $X^2$  test showed no relationship between age, education, WWOOFing career, travel career, and leisure activities. However, gender was related to the leisure profiles, reproducing gender stereotypes. As compared to males, females read more ( $X^2 = 18.258$ ;  $df = 6$ ,  $p < .006$ ;  $cc = 0.13$ ;  $p < .000$ ), hung out more with friends ( $X^2 = 21.738$ ;  $df = 6$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $cc = 0.13$ ;  $p < .000$ ), and appreciated being with family more ( $X^2 = 20.892$ ;  $df = 6$ ,  $p < .002$ ;  $cc = 0.13$ ;  $p < .002$ ). On the other hand, males liked to be on their computers more ( $X^2 = 19.219$ ;  $df = 6$ ,  $p < .004$ ;  $cc = 0.13$ ;  $p < .004$ ).

### Personal characteristics

An exploratory factor analysis was conducted on 33 questions referring to personal characteristics and self-perception. The results (see Table 4) revealed a seven-factor solution, which explained 55% of variance after 12 iterations (KMO = .869, Bartlett test of sphericity = 10407.639 ( $gl = 435$ ;  $\sigma = 0.0000$ )). Questions loading less than 0.50 on the factors were discarded. Sum-scores based on factors 1, 2, 3, and 6 obtained Cronbach's alpha

**Table 4.** Results of exploratory factor analysis of personal characteristics ( $n = 1184$ ).

	Factor Loadings	Eigenvalue	% of variance explained	Cumulative %
<b>Factor 1. Empathic (Cronbach's <math>\alpha = 0.82</math>)</b>		<b>6.62</b>	<b>22.06</b>	<b>22.06</b>
I can easily understand the emotional state and feelings of other people	.78			
I can easily discover needs and wishes held by other people	.73			
The suffering of other people impacts me	.63			
I feel sad when I see other people crying	.59			
I consider other people's feelings	.58			
I feel that I should help when I see someone suffering	.52			
I feel happy when I see that other people are having a good time	.51			
<b>Factor 2. Goal-oriented (Cronbach's <math>\alpha = 0.72</math>)</b>		<b>2.56</b>	<b>8.52</b>	<b>30.58</b>
I enjoy setting long-term goals	.75			
I always follow my ideas through	.74			
I like to challenge myself	.66			
I review work critically	.54			
<b>Factor 3. Outgoing (Cronbach's <math>\alpha = .61</math>)</b>		<b>2.03</b>	<b>6.77</b>	<b>37.36</b>
I like to make new friends	.64			
I always have a lust for new adventures	.64			
Generally, I am a very happy person	.51			
<b>Factor 4. Reserved (Cronbach's <math>\alpha = .59</math>)</b>		<b>1.76</b>	<b>5.86</b>	<b>43.22</b>
I often conceal/hide my feelings	.76			
I am a quite reserved and shy person	.73			
<b>Factor 5. Recognition-seeking (Cronbach's <math>\alpha = .54</math>)</b>		<b>1.28</b>	<b>4.28</b>	<b>47.49</b>
It's important for me to feel that other people care about my wellbeing	.66			
I'm easily disappointed	.64			
I enjoy that people appreciate/recognise my efforts/work	.54			
I feel nervous in front of new situations/big events	.52			
<b>Factor 6. Child-caring (Cronbach's <math>\alpha = .73</math>)</b>		<b>1.18</b>	<b>3.93</b>	<b>51.44</b>
I enjoy taking care of small children	.72			
I feel an urge to assist and comfort children who are crying	.63			
<b>Factor 7. Egoist and Materialist (Cronbach's <math>\alpha = .50</math>)</b>		<b>1.05</b>	<b>3.50</b>	<b>54.94</b>
It doesn't matter to me if some people suffer in other parts of the world	.70			
I am not easily disturbed by other people's emotions	.68			
Material things are important for a person's wellbeing	.57			

Notes: Method of extraction: Principle component analysis. Method of rotation: Varimax with Kaiser.

<sup>a</sup>Converging at 12 rotations.

coefficients ranging from 0.82–0.61, respectively. However, sum-scores based on factors 4, 5, and 7 obtained low Cronbach's alpha coefficients, ranging from 0.59–0.50, which indicate low stability.

The first factor, accounting for 22% of the total variance, was named *Empathetic*. Themes loading on this factor concerned understanding others' feelings, sadness, and urge to help people suffering. The second factor, named *Goal-oriented*, accounted for 8.5% of the total variance and consisted of questions related to scrutinising work and new challenges. The third factor, named *Outgoing*, accounted for 6.7% of the total variance and included characteristics of being a friendly and happy person, socially oriented, and outgoing. The fourth factor, named *Reserved*, accounted for 5.8% of the total variance and contained personal characteristics that were contrary to factor 3, that is, questions

**Table 5.**  $\chi^2$  test results from cross-tabulation of personal characteristics with gender ( $n = 1184$ ).

	GENDER	
	Females higher than males	Males higher than females
<b>Empathic</b>		
When animals suffer, I feel that I should relieve their problems	$\chi^2 = 18.936; df = 6, p < .004;$ $cc = 0.13; p < .004$	
I can easily understand the emotional state and feelings of other people	$\chi^2 = 13.206; df = 6, p < .040;$ $cc = 0.11; p < .040$	
I feel sad when I see other people crying	$\chi^2 = 24.352; df = 6, p < .000;$ $cc = 0.14; p < .000$	
<b>Child-caring</b>		
I enjoy taking care of small children	$\chi^2 = 36.630; df = 6, p < .000;$ $cc = 0.17; p < .000$	
I feel an urge to assist and comfort children who are crying	$\chi^2 = 14.451; df = 6, p < .025;$ $cc = 0.11; p < .025$	
<b>Egoist and Materialist</b>		
Material things are important for a person's wellbeing		$\chi^2 = 24.009; df = 6, p < .001;$ $cc = 0.14; p < .001$
It does not matter to me if some people suffer in other parts of the world		$\chi^2 = 50.145; df = 6, p < .000;$ $cc = 0.20; p < .000$
I am not easily disturbed by other people's emotions		$\chi^2 = 50.949; df = 6, p < .000;$ $cc = 0.20; p < .000$

related to being reserved and having difficulties with communicating feelings. The fifth factor, named *Recognition-seeking*, accounted for 4.6% of the total variance, and questions loading on this factor were somewhat diverse, including the pursuit of external approval, anxiety when faced with new situations, and being easily disappointed. The remaining two factors had low levels of explained variance. The sixth factor received loadings from two questions that probed for aspects of “motherhood” and was named *Child-caring*. The seventh factor was called *Egoist and Materialist*, and received loadings from three questions probing for egoistic orientations and self-comfort seeking, thus representing a kind of anti-volunteer attitude.

A cross-tabulation of the personal characteristics with sociodemographic variables (gender, age, education) showed gender differences, which reflected some gender stereotypes. Females scored higher than males on questions focusing on sensitive, motherhood, and empathic attitudes, while the opposite was true for questions focusing on materialist and egoist orientations (see Table 5).

## Discussion

WWOOFers in Norway are mainly female, young, well educated, and residents outside Norway, thus mainly supporting previous research findings from New Zealand (McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006) and Australia (Deville, 2011; Deville et al., 2016b). However, WWOOFers' gender is more balanced in the present study, thus questioning the presumption that WWOOF as a phenomenon has much higher appeal to females as compared to males (Deville et al., 2016b; McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006).

Regarding age, the WWOOFers in Norway are rather similar to those studied by McIntosh and Bonnemann (2006) and Deville et al. (2016b); however, fewer WWOOFers in Norway hold full-time work positions than what was found in the comparable Australian study. The proportion of WWOOFers with university degrees was higher, and the proportion of single WWOOFers was lower in this Norwegian study, as compared to the

Australian one (Deville et al., 2016b). In the New Zealand study (McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006), a higher proportion of the respondents preferred to go WWOOFing alone as compared to the present study, which, on the other hand found a higher proportion of WWOOFers who preferred to travel with friends. Sample size may explain parts of the differences between the Australian and the present studies. However, as a WWOOF destination, Norway is quite different from Australia and New Zealand in several ways and Norway draws on partly different pools of potential WWOOFers.

WWOOFers learned about WWOOFing mainly through “word of mouth”, as also found by Deville et al. (2016b). However, the two studies show different results for the role of Internet, which is far more important in the present study as compared to the Australian one. This might be a result of the increasing spread and dominance of Internet and more frequent use of web pages as search channels on a global level since the Australian study was conducted, but also that web-based information may be more accessible in Northern Europe than elsewhere.

WWOOFers' countries of residence are somewhat different in Norway as compared to Australia and New Zealand. WWOOFers to Norway come from 83 different countries, as compared to 24 countries in the Australia (Deville et al., 2016b; comparable data from New Zealand is lacking). Ranked by frequencies of WWOOFers, U.S.A., Germany, France, and Italy were the top four outbound destinations for WWOOFers registered in Norway, accounting for 49% of the respondents. Germany, South Korea, U.K., and Japan were the top four outbound destinations for WWOOFers going to Australia, accounting for 59% of the respondents in Deville et al.'s (2016b) study. U.S.A., Germany, U.K., and Japan were the top four outbound destinations to New Zealand, accounting for 62% of the respondents in McIntosh and Bonnemann's (2006) study. Across the three studies, the vast majority of WWOOFers arrived from Western and industrialised countries, although WWOOFing as a rather cheap way of travelling abroad would fit well also for travellers from less affluent nations. German WWOOFers are the only group of significant size appearing in all three countries. Except for the WWOOFers originating from the U.S. and the U.K., distance from home country seems to relate to number of WWOOFers from each country. U.S. WWOOFers top the list in both Norway and New Zealand but are rarely seen in Australia. U.K. and Asian countries are quite large outbound destinations for New Zealand and Australia, while they are small outbound destinations for Norway. WWOOFers from U.K. has just a short travel distance to Norway but constitute a small portion here. As the U.S. has the third largest population worldwide, and Japan ranges as the tenth, one may expect these countries to be among the largest outbound WWOOFing destinations. However, seven other countries range above Japan in number of inhabitants without ranking high as outbound WWOOFing destinations, and (in order of population size) Germany, France, U.K., Italy, which are high-ranking outbound destinations, are ranked 17-23, according to population size, and South Korea as 27. Further research should address differences in popularity across outbound destinations, particularly investigating to what extent this is an effect of a Word-of-mouth communication and trust in countrymen's reports on their lived WWOOFing experiences. Moreover, both the differences of time and geography may account for parts of the observed inter-study differences, as WWOOF has spread to several new nations between 2009 and 2017. Hence, both the geography and history of WWOOFing should call closer research attention.

In line with Deville's (2011; Deville et al., 2016b) findings, the WWOOFers in the present study lived mainly in urban areas, and rural areas (where farming is commonly found) are underrepresented as residential areas. Although only one-third had a rural or farming background, three out of four had WWOOFed one time or more, indicating that they had some degree of experience with the WWOOFing practice. The WWOOFers in Norway thus constitute a more experienced group as compared to those in New Zealand (McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006) and Australia (Deville et al., 2016b).

Among the WWOOFers in Norway, more than 8% had currently no permanent place to live; some of them had left their home in search for a job, while others were "travelling the world". In line with the studies of McIntosh and Bonnemann (2006) and Deville et al. (2016b), the present study points in the direction that there might be an overlap between WWOOFers and long-term-budget travellers.

The WWOOFers registered in Norway are experienced travellers who see travelling as an important part of their lives. They have adventurous travel spirits, seek new adventures, visit new destinations, and spend time with locals. The contact with local people is essential to the WWOOFers, as also shown by Burns and Kondo (2015), Deville (2011), Deville et al. (2016a, 2016b), Kosnik (2014), McIntosh and Bonnemann (2006), and McIntosh and Campbell (2001). Moreover, this study found that several of the WWOOFers were "experienced WWOOFers" in the sense that one-third had WWOOFed once and another third twice or more. This contrasts strongly to McIntosh and Bonnemann's (2006) findings where nine out of ten had no previous WWOOF experience. This could be related to the time lapse between the two studies (2001 versus 2017). As indicated by previous research (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2001; Lynch et al., 2011), in this study WWOOFing stands out as adventurous travelling, far from mass "institutionalised" tourism, and as an escape from everyday routines and duties. It involves a search for authenticity and real experiences, an urge to get "back to nature", truly engage with others, and to enjoy cultural immersion, freedom, and spontaneity.

The WWOOFers in this study expressed ideal lifestyles that, to some extent, parallel the philosophy of WWOOF, as discussed by authors such as Kosnik (2013) and Tomlinson (2008). Almost all of them would like to have a more sustainable lifestyle and spend more time in the outdoors. Four out of five would like to live in the countryside and to have less stress and a slower life. Seven out of ten would even have an organic farm and almost half of the respondents would not live in a city, whereas one-third would prefer urban dwelling. These finding might reflect an openness to or even motivation for a non-urban future lifestyle, which might have been stimulated by their contact with WWOOF. If so, this tendency is in line with claims made by Ekers et al. (2016) and Terry (2014) that volunteering as farm workers is an intermingling of work with non-economic factors like alternative non-institutionalised learning, cultural exchanges and socialising under radically new conditions while pursuing a sustainable lifestyle and building a social movement related to organic food production. Moreover, Terry (2014) underscores the self-fulfilment and reciprocity achieved in successful host-WWOOFer relationships, and that WWOOFers contributes to cover the lack of labour in farming both as volunteers and as future wage-paid workforce. On the other hand, two-thirds of the WWOOFers in Norway were not members of other volunteer organisations, and the respondents of this study were far from being consequent buyers of organic products in their daily lives. Their leisure time pursuits were dominated by activities such as reading, hanging out with



friends, relaxing, and doing sports. Hence, there seems to be a gap between what the WWOOFers express as a *desired lifestyle* and *what they do* in their daily life.

Previous research has cast some doubt about the WWOOFers' altruistic orientation towards the ethics of WWOOFing and questioned the degree to which WWOOFers are attached to the WWOOF philosophy (Deville et al., 2016a, 2016b; McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006; Miller & Mair, 2014), and Brown and Morrison (2003) distinguish between the "volunteer-minded" and the "vacation-minded" volunteers. This study supports such scepticism to some degree; however, the WWOOFers' dedication to the philosophy of WWOOF may perhaps best be described as inconsistent and as having "shades of grey".

As shown by the outcome of the factor analysis of personality characteristics, the WWOOFers in this study seemed to be quite diverse as a group. The first factor, the *Empathic*, contained characteristics that seemed to align with willingness to help and do voluntary work, which is a basic condition for being a WWOOFer. This factor accounted for almost one-quarter of the total scale variance. However, the factor structure also revealed the opposite style as factor 7, the *Egoist and Materialist* style, accounting for a minor proportion of the scale variance, which seems a bit misplaced within the WWOOF movement. It may indicate, though, that a smaller proportion of the WWOOFers in Norway tend to exploit the system to chase their own selfish benefits. Likewise, the second factor, the *Goal-oriented style*, accounting for eight percent of the total scale variance, might reflect a group of genuine WWOOFers seriously striving to make a difference by contributing to the realisation of the WWOOF philosophy. However, here alternative and selfish goal orientations that are incompatible with the WWOOF philosophy might also be pursued. More research is needed to interpret what goal-orientation means in this context.

A second pair of opposing personal characteristics factors were factor 3 – *Outgoing* and factor 4 – *Reserved*, accounting for seven and six percent of the scale variance, respectively. The Outgoing factor represents WWOOFers eager to make new friends and seek new adventures, which prepares them to relate to foreign farmers in their home, new friends at the farms, and locals in the surroundings. Contrary to this are the characteristics represented in factor 4, *Reserved*, representing a style of being shy and less able to share one's emotions. Obviously, they might experience more challenges in the socio-emotional parts of the WWOOFing process, and their personal development may benefit from this if they succeed in overcoming their shyness and open their emotions. If staying with a host who presents a friendly and family-oriented attitude towards the WWOOFer (Mostafanezhad et al., 2015; Terry, 2014), this may lead to a personal development and thus, farm travelling could be a hidden place to increase one's self-insights and to assess what creates personal values and meaning (McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006). Alternatively, this group will terminate their WWOOFing career because of the social demands they will encounter in situ.

Finally, factor 5, *Recognition-seeking*, may be worth noticing as an indication of WWOOFing to be "seen" in a social context, be it between peers or at the actual farm host. However, the questions loading on this factor indicate that it also represents a socio-emotional vulnerability and that disappointments may loom large behind this personal characteristic. After all, some WWOOFers are disenchanted with their stay and some even break out (JOM85, 2014; Zoldos, 2016).

As indicated above, the WWOOFers in Norway constitute a quite complex group. In addition, some age and gender differences apply across the diversity dimensions described above. Thus, compared to the younger ones, older WWOOFers typically have higher WWOOF membership seniority, have made a higher number of WWOOFs, have more farming experiences, have more international travel experiences, prefer visiting unknown destinations, want more information about the destination before going there, and prefer to travel with family, but are less likely to be members of volunteer organisations. Likewise, gender makes a difference. Female WWOOFers have higher frequencies of international travel and spend more time reading and socialising with friends and family, and their personal characteristics are more on the empathic side and more oriented towards taking care of children, while the male WWOOFers are more oriented towards egoism and prefer travelling to destinations that are more classical.

As for now, WWOOFing activities slow down due to inbound Corona-related travel restrictions. However, based on the WWOOFers' frequent international travel patterns, it is reasonable to expect this activity to flourish again when entering the future post-Corona period.

## Conclusion

Being the first cross-sectional study of WWOOFing in Europe, this study of WWOOFers in Norway partly contradicts and partly supports findings from previous research on WWOOFing in other countries, while also presenting some new insights about WWOOFing. The study confirms that WWOOFers are mainly single people aged 20–29 years and with low incomes and often without a job. Still, a quarter of the Norwegian WWOOFers were over 30 years old, and a third were in stable relationships. New is the finding that age is an important characteristic, as it relates to variability in WWOOFers' experiences, preferences, and behaviour.

The study confirms findings from Australia and New Zealand in that WWOOFers are well educated but contradicts previous research regarding skewed gender balance. Like age and WWOOFing career, gender appears to be an important variable, as it relates to variability in travel habits and preferences, and to personal characteristics.

Information about WWOOFing is still, in most cases, spread through "word of mouth", but Internet use has grown radically in importance. Contradicting previous research, most of the WWOOFers travelling to Norway are experienced, having WWOOFed once or several times before. They are almost exclusively foreigners and have arrived from 83 countries, which is a much wider range than found in WWOOFing research in New Zealand and Australia. U.S.A., Germany, and France dominate as outbound destinations among WWOOFers to Norway, which is partly different from the studies from Australia and New Zealand. There is no clear relationship between the outbound destinations and the receiving destinations with reference to geographical distance between the two; hence, other factors may explain this relationship.

WWOOFers in Norway are a diverse group with respect to genuine interest in organic farming. On one hand, a significant proportion reported buying organic products and an interest in organic production, activities that reflect concern for the environment or other sustainable practices. Some WWOOFers displayed empathy as a personal characteristic, which might be argued to be a personal trait that is more in line with the WWOOF

philosophy. As a first and dominant factor in the factor analysis of personal characteristics, it supports the belief that some of the Norwegian WWOOFers are what we could then label “real WWOOFers”. However, some may represent less engagement with the WWOOF philosophy as indicated by the egoist and materialist factor. Thus, this study supports previous research. The less engaged are characterised by a limited interest in rural living, inconsistency in purchasing of organic products, low social engagement, and not being registered members in volunteer organisations. In addition, the WWOOFers reported a high appreciation of travel and adventure, and less engagement in knowing about the destination. It is difficult to estimate the exact proportion of highly engaged WWOOFers as the criteria are still not established, which is a task for further studies. Moreover, future research should aim at identifying different sub-groups of WWOOFers based on their motivation for and benefits from their experiences.

While the convergences with previous research findings strengthen the validity of this study, the inconsistency in findings between this study and previous research indicates that the population of WWOOFers and their preferences and behaviour are still not fully known and probably developing as WWOOF spreads to new nations. As the WWOOFing phenomenon is still under-researched, future studies should dig deeper into the characteristics of this seemingly diverse group. The geography, history and demography of WWOOFing appears as promising research foci and should be established as relevant research streams for the near future. Longitudinal studies might reveal long-term effects of the WWOOFing experiences, and mixed method studies might combine systematic cross-sectional or longitudinal data with insights gained through qualitative approaches. The quantitative approaches will mainly be useful in establishing descriptive overviews, identify group differences, show statistical strength of relationships, and make predictions, while the qualitative approaches increase our understanding of the phenomena.

## Notes

1. Some researchers still wrongly refer to the movement as “Willing workers on Organic Farms” (see e.g. Deville et al., 2016b, p. 91; McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006).
2. <http://www.woofnorway.org/>, last accessed 29 April 2020.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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