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A Case Study: The Impact of Participatory Volunteer Work on an Individual's Life and Wellbeing

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The objective of this case study was to examine and describe individuals' motivation to volunteer at Prometheus Camp Association – a non-governmental youth organization that was founded in 1990 to support the arrangement of religiously and politically unaffiliated "coming-of-age camps" as an alternative to confirmation camps. In addition, it will be assessing the perceived impact that volunteering in these roles has had on these individuals' lives, skills, and wellbeing. The findings can help Prometheus Camp Association and its partners understand their active members' motivation and perceived value of the organization and its methods. Furthermore, these findings may also deepen our understanding on the perceived benefits of participatory NGOs and the needs that individuals hope to fulfil by participating.

Data was gathered through six semi-structured qualitative interviews, and further processed by way of content analysis based on interview transcripts. The interviews were focused around several questions asked from everyone, but the interviewees were free to reflect on anything relevant or important to them. Findings were reflected against theories on volunteering, empowerment, and mental health. The interview questions focused on motivation, expectations, and experiences. Furthermore, perceptions of personal contribution and personal gains were discussed. They were asked whether they considered their sense of inclusion and self-esteem had been affected by them volunteering in the roles that they had worked in.

The findings show various effects on these individuals' lives: ranging from a feeling of togetherness, through boosted self-esteem, to acquired skills, such as dialogue skills and organizational skills. These findings can help us better understand why individuals stay with organizations, and what kinds of communal activities help form a balanced and meaningful life.

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Tämän tapaustutkimuksen tavoite on kartoittaa ja kuvailla Prometheus-leirin tuki ry:n vapaaehtoistoimijoiden motivaatiota toimia kyseisen järjestön tehtävissä, sekä näissä rooleissa toimimisen koettuja vaikutuksia yksilön elämään, taitoihin, ja hyvinvointiin. Prometheus-leirin tuki ry perustettiin vuonna 1990 tukemaan uskonnollisesti ja poliittisesti sitoutumattomien "aikuistumisleirien" järjestämistä vaihtoehtona rippileireille. Löydökset voivat auttaa Prometheus-leirin tuki ry:tä ja sen yhteistyökumppaneita ymmärtämään vapaaehtoistoimijoidensa motivaatiota ja heidän kokemaansa järjestön ja sen metodien arvoa. Nämä löydökset saattavat myös syventää ymmärrystämme osallistavan vapaaehtoistyön koetusta hyödystä, sekä tarpeista joita yksilöt pyrkivät osallistumalla täyttämään.

Data kerättiin kuudessa semistrukturoidussa laadullisessa haastattelussa, ja puhtaaksikirjoituksia prosessoitiin pidemmälle sisällönanalyysin kautta. Haastattelut keskittyivät muutamaan kysymykseen jotka kysyttiin jokaiselta, mutta haastateltavat olivat vapaita reflektoimaan mitä vaan mitä he kokivat relevantiksi tai tärkeäksi itselleen. Löydöksiä reflektoitiin vasten teoriaa vapaaehtoistyöstä, voimaantumisesta, ja mielenterveydestä. Haastattelukysymykset keskittyivät motivaatioon, odotuksiin, ja kokemuksiin. Lisäksi, käsittelyssä olivat koettu henkilökohtainen kontribuutio, sekä omat saamisen kokemukset. Heiltä kysyttiin, onko vapaaehtoistoiminta vaikuttanut heidän kokemukseensa mukaanotettuna olemisesta tai heidän kokemukseensa itsetunnostaan.

Löydökset näyttävät useita vaikutuksia näiden yksilöiden elämään: vaihdellen yhteisöllisyydentunteista, nousseen itsetunnon kautta saatuihin taitoihin, kuten keskustelutaidot ja organisatoriset taidot. Nämä löydökset voivat auttaa meitä ymmärtämään paremmin miksi ihmiset pysyvät järjestöissä, ja minkälaiset yhteisölliset aktiviteetit auttavat tasapainoisen ja merkityksellisen elämän muodostamisessa.

| Avainsanat | osallistava vapaaehtoistoiminta, dialogi, läheisyys, itsetunto, mielenterveys, motivaatio, nuorisojärjestö, voimaantuminen, sosiaalipedagogiikka, Prometheus-leirin tuki ry |

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1 Introduction

This thesis looks at a non-profit, non-governmental youth organization that provides coming-of-age camps for teenagers as well as adults, and organizes trainings and other events related to the organization's nature. The organization's trainings are for volunteer camp counselors, camp counselor teams, trainers, and the rest of its actives. Other events include assemblies, seminars, reflections, celebrations, the Youth Philosophy Event, etc. Prometheus Camp Association's working methods are based on humanitarian ideas and participatory volunteer work.

Choosing Prometheus Camp Association as the focus of this thesis was a simple decision because I have personally been working with this organization for years, and I believe that this topic will provide meaningful discussion in professional as well as personal platforms. This study aims to explain and describe why individuals are interested in participatory volunteer work within a non-governmental organization: what are their motives behind participating, what do they expect to gain from participating, and how do they feel like they contribute to the world around them by participating.

The experiences of Prometheus camp participants are surveyed yearly, camp counselor teams are surveyed concerning the functioning of their team and concerning the condition of the campsite, and trainees are surveyed on their opinions about the trainings that they have attended, but otherwise the organization does not survey its members and actives on a regular basis. However, feedback has a strong foothold on the organization's methods. I would like to provide Prometheus Camp Association with a case study and an evaluation concerning the experiences of its actives when it comes to the organization's meaning in these individuals' lives. A case study in English may also have some potential to help market the organization to its international partners, and I as a native English speaker have the opportunity to provide such a study as well as further discussion in both English and Finnish. The author of this thesis along with their volunteer colleague were asked a question during a presentation at an international seminar in Basque Country: "Why do people do this volunteer work? What do you get out of it?" This thesis will let audiences in on an assessment and an overview of the subjectively meaningful effects of this kind of work from the volunteers' perspective.

1.1 Terminology

This thesis uses terms such as "active", "volunteer", "member", and "participant" to talk about the people who are in some way affiliated with the organization's activities. "Active" and "volunteer" refer to those individuals who do or have done volunteer work for the organization in various roles, and these people are the target group of this thesis. These two terms may be used interchangeably, but the word "active" might also refer to a volunteer that uses a considerable amount of their free time on volunteer activities. Actives can be divided into many subgroups such as camp counselors, trainers, section members, cooks, and such. "Member" refers to any members of the organization; members can also be actives, but not necessarily. "Participant" can refer to any kind of a participant, depending on the context – for example camp participants, individuals present at the organization's event, etc.

Additionally, Prometheus Camp Association will later on be referred to by its strongly established nickname: Protu.

2 Prometheus Camp Association

The partner and focus of this case study is a Finnish youth organization run on volunteer efforts. Prometheus Camp Association (Prometheus-leirin tuki ry, "Protu"), was founded in 1990 by Feto ry (Teachers of Philosophy and Ethics) and some secondary school students of ethics, i.e., those who do not participate in religious studies. The idea came to them after realizing that the Evangelical-Lutheran church offered confirmation camps or "coming-of-age camps", but non-denominational alternatives were not available. Protu and its camps are politically and religiously unaffiliated, and generally any willing participant is welcome to join the activities. In order to become a camp counselor team member, a trainer, a section member, or any other kind of NGO active within this organization, you just need to apply to the position, be accepted, and then be trained or briefed for it. The topics of politics and religion are, however, greatly discussed within the organization, but with a critical and open-minded approach. (Prometheus-leirin tuki ry n.d.; Taipale 2007.)

The first camp was organized in 1989, and a year later the organization was founded to support the activities of carrying out these camps. The first, original camps were meant for 14-15-year-olds, but later on Protu has gone on to offer "senior camps" for 16-19-year-olds, as well as "adult camps" for those 20 or older. The organization wants to encourage open dialogue, reflection, and developing one's own philosophy of life. Respecting oneself and others is a key value in the organization, and responsibility for oneself, your own actions, and your impact on the world are also emphasized. (Prometheus-leirin tuki ry n.d.; Taipale 2007.)

Currently the organization has about 4,000 members, and more than 100 of them work as volunteers in various sections of the organization. The term "active" can also refer to those individuals who regularly participate within the organization in roles such as camp counselors, trainers, cooks, etc. Around 60-70 camps are organized per year, and that means more than 400 camp counselors per year. The organization trains all of its volunteers at weekend-long trainings, led by volunteer trainers. Cooks – meaning volunteer cooks who are rarely professionals in the field – at camps, trainings, and other events are briefed by Protu as well, and these cooks alongside two office secretaries are the only paid employees of the organization; therefore, the organization relies on volunteering to keep its activities rolling. (Prometheus-leirin tuki ry n.d.)

Prometheus camps were featured in Ilkka Taipale's book called "100 Social Innovations from Finland", and this thesis could be used to boost the marketing of this innovative organization further. A Swedish daughter organization – Protus Sverige – was founded in 2008, and there are more potential partners in other countries.

2.1   Methods, Themes, and Values

All camps have similar important themes and topics that are dealt with in several interactive ways, such as dialogue, debates, playing, art, music, drama, writing, sports or physical activity, media, and so on. Both individual exercises as well as group activities. Innovation of methods and carrying out themes is highly encouraged, but many methods and programs are also "recycled", because they have been successful in the past. Dialogue can be carried out in various group sizes and formations, but a general characteristic for many of the dialogue sessions is that everyone – unless unable to – sits in a circle on mattresses, so that everyone is literally and physically on the same level, and

so that everyone can see each other. This sort of a setting is also seen to encourage a relaxed, open, and informal atmosphere. Camp counselors and trainers need some level of natural authority to be able to control and facilitate the activities, but artificial and redundant hierarchy is always minimized. This feature is one of those of great importance, because outside of these activities teenagers do not tend to be treated as equals among adults – teachers, parents, and other adults are almost always in a leading hierarchical position.

For the sake of understanding the nature of Prometheus camps and some of the values of the organization on a deeper level, here is a list of brief descriptions of the camp themes from Protu's website:

DIFFERENCES AND EQUALITY
- The concepts of 'difference', 'similarity', and 'normality'.
- Stereotypes and social roles.
- Bullying and discrimination, including their formation and ways of reducing discrimination.

LIFE AND FUTURE
- How can I influence the direction of the future?
- What are 'time' and 'happiness'? How about 'past'?
- Pondering and understanding one's own goals, dreams, and fears are crucial parts of maturity.
- The future of the whole world.

SOCIETY AND INFLUENCING
- One's role and place in society.
- The building blocks of a functional society.
- Encouraging active citizenship. Exploring the need for influencing as well as opportunities for influencing.

MEDIA
- The diversity of media.
- Reliability of information and source criticism.
- One's role as a media producer and media consumer.
- The power of media and its impact on the behavior or individuals and society.

WORLDVIEWS AND IDEOLOGIES
- Tools for forming one's own world view.
- The concepts of and differences between 'worldview', 'ideology', 'religion', and 'lifestyle'.
- Ethical and moral questions.
- Origins and reasoning of personal values and opinions.

IDENTITY
- Individual personhood is at the core of this theme.
- Self-image, identity, self-esteem, and the things that influence them.
- The building blocks of my selfhood.
- What do I like and dislike about myself?
- The objective is to support the development of everyone's identity, and to enhance their feeling of being good just the way they are.

ENVIRONMENT (SURROUNDINGS)
- What does the concept of 'environment' consist of? - Personal relationship with the environment. The impact of one's actions. - Tools for exploring one's environment/surroundings and for influencing it. - Taking responsibility for the environment.
SUBSTANCES (DRUGS)
- Why do people use substances? - How does substance use affect the individual and society? - What is my personal stance on substances and their use? - Various kinds of addiction.
RELATIONSHIPS (HUMAN RELATIONS)
- The large scale of relationships: close relationships as well as larger social networks. - Differences between relationships, one's role in them, and the various resulting emotions.
SEXUALITY
- Love, infatuation, sexuality, sex and gender, embodiment. - The effects of social norms on sexual behavior and emotions. - Self-determination over sexuality and gender.

Protu has developed a "Rosette of Aims" (Figure 1) to portray its aims for its camps. This and other materials are developed by the organization and its members, and all material is made to support coherence of activities and goal-oriented planning. This figure is mainly used as a reflection point, and by no means is it a rulebook or a list of discussion topics.
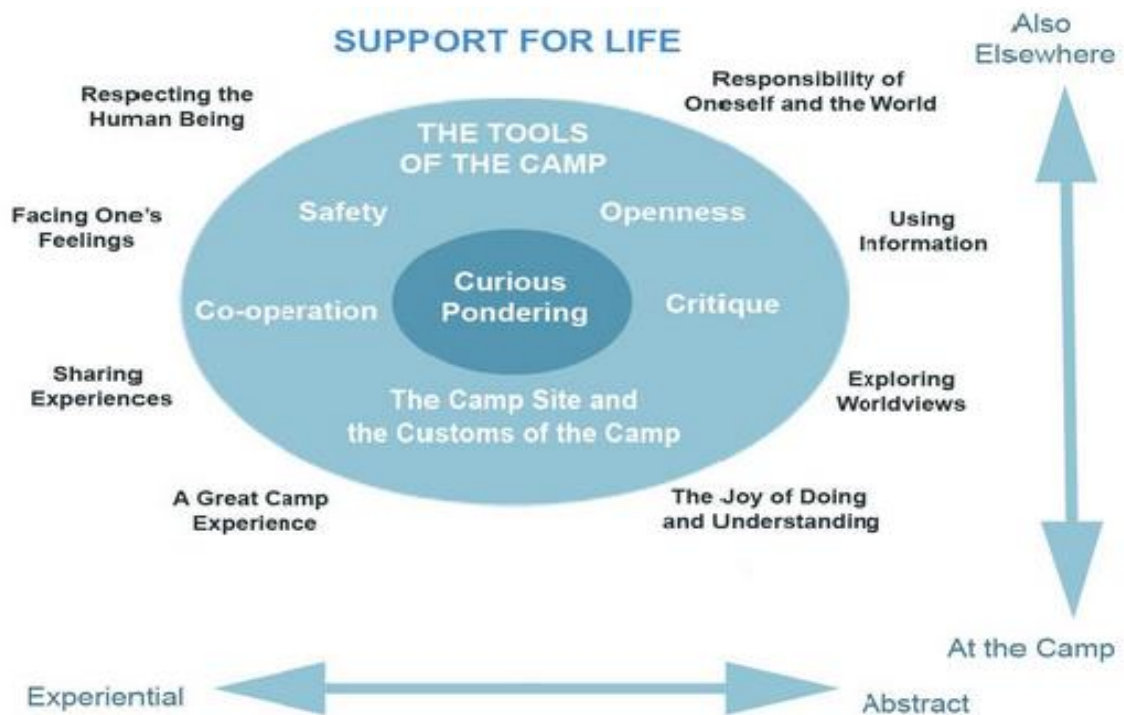

Figure 1. The Rosette of Aims.
Source: Prometheus-leirin tuki ry / Prometheus Camp Association.

3   Volunteer Work and Wellbeing

3.1   Volunteer Work

Volunteer work – any kind of beneficial activity done without a salary – can be seen as an embodiment of active citizenship, and active citizenship can be divided into four aspects: identity, participation, encountering, and caring. Identity guides an individual towards the kind of activities that they value, and activities that they consider societally beneficial. Participation fights isolation and concretizes active citizenship – participation promotes opportunities for influencing one's environment. Encountering is about turning one's attention outwards, whereas identity was the opposite. Humans have a need to be encountered, heard, and interacted with. This brings us to caring: caring about oneself is essential and can promote one's empathy towards others as well. Societies will not flourish if their citizens have no interest towards the lives of others. This aspect brings about empathy, humanity, equality, and social responsibility. Volunteering is about immersing oneself as a personality to participate in caring interaction with other individuals and groups. (Harju in Nylund & Yeung 2005, pp. 68-70.)

Nylund and Yeung (2005, p. 16) have examined volunteering through three main categories, where the categories of reward and values are especially relevant in this case study:

> "**Reward:** How are volunteers feeling rewarded? Why did they join, why do they continue?
>
> **Values:** What are the underlying values behind motivation and commitment to volunteering? What elements of world view and values are present in the activities?
>
> **Involvement:** What forms of participation does the volunteer work entail? Is there something problematic in the concept of involvement? What is the relationship between involvement and activity?"

Some important aspects of volunteer commitment include participatory and volunteer-inclusive planning of activities, promotion of learning and emotional bonds between volunteers, and free form of activities. When wanting to boost volunteer commitment, it is important to include volunteers in decision-making, and to invite them to share their views on why their chosen volunteer work is motivating. Encouragement towards sharing and innovating ideas can benefit an organization's volunteer practices. Volunteers are unpaid workers, but investing in their support services and following their wellbeing is equally

crucial in order to promote sustainable practices. Discussions on experiences and spontaneous positive feedback promote wellbeing and positive learning. Free form of activities refers to opportunities for personal influencing and a variety of options. (Nylund & Yeung 2005, pp. 31-32.) The interviews for this case study strongly hinted towards these elements being present in Protu's practices.

3.2 Mental Health

> "Mental health is a state of wellbeing in which an individual can realize his or her own potential, cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively, and make a contribution to the community."
> (World Health Organization n.d.)

> "Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood."
> (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services n.d.)

Mental health is an indivisible component of an individual's health in general, and as a whole, the concept of mental health includes psychological wellbeing as well as mental disorders, illnesses, and problems. Self-esteem, perceived wellbeing, resilience, and the ability to sustain satisfying personal relationships are essential parts of positive mental health. Feelings of happiness are components of a state of positive mental health, but mental health is more than those feelings – the concept of mental health is something more permanent and longer-lasting, whereas pleasant feelings may emerge temporarily. (Lehtinen 2008, pp. 6-8, 19, 28.) Enough positive feelings about oneself help empower an individual to find effective ways of coping with life and its challenges, and furthermore, evidence suggests a link between a lack of self-esteem, depression, and perceived alienation. Feedback is easier to handle and implement when an individual's self-confidence is at a healthy level and they feel like others generally respect them – or when they respect themselves. (Heatherton & Wyland 2003.)

3.3 Self-Esteem

Social interactions shape our mental health along with individual biological and psychological factors, and therefore it is important that individuals can find personally meaningful environments and activities that promote positive psychosocial interaction. While being crucial elements of societal mental health promotion, health services and clinical

mental health services are not the only elements that enhance the wellbeing and mental health of citizens; promotion of inclusivity through participation and activities can certainly prove to benefit individuals as well as various layers of communities. Volunteer work and youth organizations, for example, can act as an element of societal participation and thus as a source of support for positive mental wellbeing. NGO activities have also been observed to promote cooperation skills and responsibility, and therefore healthy psychological development of adolescents. (Lehtinen 2008, pp. 6-8, 19.) Furthermore, participation in community action has been observed to promote consciousness of social issues and to ignite people's eagerness to positively develop their society and their rights (Nylund & Yeung 2005, p. 19), and participating in collective activities and decision-making in turn promote empowerment (Perkins & Zimmerman 1995).

3.4 Empowerment

The concept of empowerment is something broader than self-esteem or locus of control, and it relates strongly to wellbeing and mental health. Empowerment considers an individual's ability to make sense of their own reality through meaningful participation and subjectivity. Here, subjectivity is not meant as the antonym for objectivity, but instead the concept describes a setting where an individual is the 'subject' of their own lives – they are not the 'object' to which things happen, but instead they are the active protagonist of their story. The ability to claim ownership of and responsibility for one's own wellbeing and learning are manifestations of empowerment. Social pedagogy is one of many frameworks that aim to support empowerment. (Perkins & Zimmerman 1995; Rauhala 2013; ThemPra n.d.) The nature of the work that is done within Protu strongly resembles social pedagogical ideals; social pedagogy focuses on learning, growth, and wellbeing – the concept of social pedagogy includes a belief in the potential and value of individuals. Inclusion of individuals helps bring about platforms for meaningful participation and contribution. (ThemPra n.d.)

4   Methodology and Objectives

The qualitative case study method is a research method for closely examining a topic or phenomenon through a limited number of research subjects. Data collection can often be carried out by observation or through interviews. Case studies observe reality at micro

levels instead of examining frequencies that would be representative of a large population. Although findings cannot be directly generalized, the intensity of the method and data collection allows us to have an intimate insight on the phenomenon, and that in itself is valuable in many themes of social sciences. (Zainal 2007.) A qualitative case study does not reveal causalities (Elmes & Kantowitz & Roediger 2006, 96).

This case study focuses on the perceived impact that volunteering at Protu has had on some of its active members. The research question concerns perceived rewards and contribution, and asks: Is wellbeing improved through these activities? Are individuals feeling empowered and included?

The data was gathered through six semi-structured interviews; there were several questions that were asked during each interview, but the interviewees and interviewer could deviate from and expand the list of themes and questions as they felt. This way the interviews were free to flow towards the topics that each individual interviewee perceived as important within the context of their personal experiences, and an understanding of subjective interpretations can be investigated. Interview audio was recorded and transcribed for further analysis. The findings of the data are reflected against relevant theories and literature.

4.1   Subjects

A message was posted in Protu's discussion group on Facebook, inviting the organization's actives to be interviewed concerning the topic of the thesis. No additional advertisement or restriction of participants needed to be carried out. Therefore, I had no direct say and thus no direct active bias in who would be chosen to be interviewed. Criteria for interview participation were:

> 1) You have been in a volunteer role for Protu (e.g., camp counselor, trainer, section member, or other "active" role, etc.).

> 2) It is your perception that working within these roles has influenced your life, your skills, or your wellbeing.

4.2   Analysis Techniques

The aim of qualitative research is to "arrive at an understanding" and an increased knowledge of a phenomenon "from the perspective of those experiencing it" (Streubert Speziale & Carpenter in Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas 2013), and a case study can be one clear example of qualitative research. The interview data in this study was analyzed by way of content analysis, and the interviewees' personal explanations of experiences are examined and valued over any interpretations or attempts to induct a theory from the material. Thus, the findings are descriptive. Content analysis is a way of summarizing and categorizing essential data from the material, and a way of detecting emerging patterns or themes (Smith 2006, p. 198).

Once the interviews were transcribed, it was possible to begin coding the data. Coding is done when relevant – pertaining to the research question – parts of the transcripts are selected for further analysis. It is always a matter of interpretation when making decisions during the process of data gathering and analysis, for example deciding what parts are considered relevant, and what degree of detail is documented in the initial interviewing stage. (Smith 2006, p. 165.) In this study, it was deemed sufficient to only document and transcribe audio of the interviews, and thus rule out analyzing things such as body language. This study focuses on the spoken explanations of perceived experiences and meanings, rather than something that could be inferred from someone's non-verbal mannerisms while discussing the topic. However, certain details – such as emphasis or excitement – were noted in the transcribing process. The data gathered from the interviews was analyzed and compiled into coherent text evaluating the topic with the assistance of supporting theory.

4.3   Credibility

Silverman (2001, p. 222) lists a summary of some important questions that need to be answered in cases of systematic attempt at description and explanation, and labels them as criteria for the evaluation of research. This list serves as a reflection of this thesis against those 10 questions:

> 1) The method of research, case study, is appropriate and suitable for the nature of the topic.

2) There is a clear distinction drawn between the collected data and existing literature; this connection is described in earlier chapters and will be further referenced in the findings.

3) The criteria for subject selection, data collection, and analysis are appropriate and described.

4) The sensitivity of methods matches the needs of the research question on this scale of a study: the interviews were approximately 45 to 60 minutes long, and thoroughly detailed. Interview questions were not set in stone, and thus the research subjects were able to add personally meaningful detail.

5) Data collection and record-keeping were systematic: interview audio was recorded, then transcribed in similar detail, and furthermore examined in a systematic manner.

6) Reference is made to accepted procedures for analysis.

7) Analysis is systematic.

8) Discussion on how themes, concepts, and categories were derived from the data is present. Said discussion is adequate for the extent of this study.

9) There is little discussion of the evidence for and against the researcher's arguments; instead, a lot of the discussion in this thesis is description of the subjects' experiences and only supporting literature.

10) A clear distinction is made between the data and its interpretation: it is always mentioned or otherwise contextually implied if a certain statement is from an interviewee/subject or from an external source, and a statement having no mention of origin may refer to the author's arguments and interpretation.

A case study examines an individual's history; therefore, gathered data is retrospective. Retrospectivity can be tricky, because newer experiences influence our earlier memories. Overt participant observation or interviews also include the risk of subjects' less-

than-truthful responses. "Motivated forgetting" is a part of our memory as a reconstructive process, and previous experiences may be explained in a way where they are altered to fit current views. Even positive memories may be altered subtly if – for example – an impact of a certain matter of fact is slightly embellished or magnified. (Elmes et al 2006, 104.) Furthermore, "a legitimate concern when studying self-reported constructs such as wellbeing and social capital is whether they measure what they are supposed to asses (validity) and whether they yield consistent results (reliability)" (Calvo & Yuhui & Kumar & Olgiati & Berkman & Mock 2012). We cannot know whether the interviewees' perception on the discussed topics would change over time, and whether the perceived impact of volunteering is actually a product of having volunteered within Protu, or instead a sum of various other things in their lives. Longitudinal data would help with this issue – to some extent (Vecina & Chacón & Marzana & Marta 2013). However, this is the risk this study takes – it asks individuals for their reconstructive reflections on their experiences and opinions in order to arouse interesting discussion.

For the sake of reliability and credibility, it is relevant to mention that I – the author of this Bachelor's Thesis – have had a long-standing personal connection with this organization. Special attention was paid to this matter of fact, and interviews were conducted with special care as to not assume or interpret answers to reflect my own experiences. Great caution was used to avoid personal involvement, but on the other hand, personal understanding of the complexity of the organization's activities and their aims was used to take the interviews to a deeper level – sort of like using existing experience as a form of covert participant observation. The findings will then be described in a way that the reader should gain an understanding on the topic.

4.4   Ethical Considerations

Prometheus Camp Association is one of the largest youth organizations in Finland. However, in practice it might seem like a small one, because a lot of active members know each other or are somehow aware of each other's existence, so to speak. Most members do not work in various sections and positions, and thus the ones that gather a lot of responsibility and recognition within the organization are likely to know the names and faces of other actives.

Confidentiality and anonymity of the interviews are important matters of interest, and no individual should be recognizable by others in this thesis. Furthermore, interviews were conducted separately as individual interviews, and thus even interview participants will not know of each other's identities. It is imperative that the researcher obtains informed consent from their research participants; the subjects of this study were verbally informed of the facts about the study as well as the right of the interviewees to withdraw their participation. The participants were not subjected to additional stress, anxiety, or other negative effects due to the study. (Smith 2006, 189-190.)

5   Findings and Discussion

> "Because it's rewarding for me; on the one hand because of the intellectual development and on the other hand because of the social relationships. And I also try to better the world a little by promoting and spreading the kinds of emotional elements and elements of worldview that I find important."
> (Appendix 2: Quotation 1.)

5.1   Initial Reasons for Participating

Most of the interviewees had been teenagers when they initially participated in Protu's activities as camp participants. The national tradition of attending confirmation camps or coming-of-age camps played a role in their initial participation: some had siblings or relatives that had participated Protu camps and afterwards boasted about the magnificence of their experiences. These interviewees had attended in ethics classes instead of religious studies at school, and decided to attend Protu camps instead of religious ones, or instead of not attending any camps whatsoever. "Why not?", said one of them. Gaining new experiences was mentioned by many as well.

One interviewee joined the organization later as an adult, without having gone to one of Protu's camps previously. Always having been irreligious and philosophically oriented, they felt like they would have enjoyed such a camp as a teenager, but the possibility of choosing to participate in Protu camps instead of religious ones was less known during the time when this interviewee was 15 years old. As they joined their first counselor trainings, they already felt "hooked" on the "wholly accepting and dialogue-encouraging

culture". Another one described a memory of being teased for not being religiously affiliated themselves – they considered it immensely important that municipalities offer activities for the youth and others outside of congregations.

5.2 Reasons for Continuing: Important or Motivating Elements

> "I wanted to give others what I had gained. (…) Everyone should have the opportunity to be just the way they are, and to be accepted."
> (Appendix 2: Quotation 2.)

Most interviewees described Protu as "their thing", and this chapter delves deeper into the aspects that these individuals perceived to be behind that feeling.

Positive camp experiences encouraged all of the interviewees to start or continue volunteering within the organization in various other roles, and most of them also described and emphasized a desire to provide others with similar experiences to those that they had themselves gained as camp participants. The interviewees described having liked most of their initial Protu experiences immensely, and felt like they had gained a lot from them. What made the first camp experience extraordinary for one individual was that many of their social prejudices were dismantled quite fast. Additionally, magnificent dialogues stayed in mind for a long time. They were able to form tight relationships with some participants, but the most important aspect was being able to comfortably be themselves.

Besides providing other people with positive experiences, new personal experiences and realizations were also expected from new volunteering roles and situations. Some mentioned that they were curious to challenge themselves in various roles that were available in the organization's activities.

5.2.1 Volunteering, Non-Profit, and Responsibility

One individual described Protu's activities as beneficial societal influencing that happens concretely and with connection to the "real world" through direct interaction and cooperation with other people. Camps were described as platforms for growth and development for all participants no matter what role they had. Each situation is unique, and each combination of individuals is unique – thus learning never ends, boredom is not to feared,

and there can always be new ways of feeling rewarded. Many others described volunteering at Protu as personally meaningful and societally beneficial activities as well – all of the interviewees felt like they were doing something good for other people and society.

Volunteering and the non-profit nature of the organization were seen as important features that attract empathetic and motivated people. One interviewee described how the organization promotes interaction between diverse individuals – people from different backgrounds and of different ages – and everyone has something to learn from and with each other. They also added that the humanist influence on the organization's values encourages a belief in the possibility of growth and development of individuals. The interviewees were impressed by Protu's continuation through the passing on of know-how and experience; individuals change and the organization develops, but a certain kind of subculture and atmosphere are still present. The possibility to analyze and unravel stressful thoughts about volunteering or anything else was considered valuable, and – as described in an earlier chapter – Nylund and Yeung (2005) agree.

The possibility of young people having responsible roles was praised by the interviewees; this was considered a unique opportunity to develop new and existing skills, a sense of responsibility, and self-confidence. Protu was said to have a "soft approach" to the concept of success versus failure: people are encouraged to challenge themselves, and outcomes are evaluated appropriately and constructively. Therefore, a low threshold for participation is promoted. This does not rule out preparation and goal-oriented planning – on the contrary: they are encouraged and practiced. Trust is an essential part of responsibility; trust is also a factor of social capital, which in turn is likely to promote life satisfaction (Calvo et al 2012). Responsibility and equality are apparent emerging values in this quotation from one of the interviewees:

> "[A thing that I find important:] Growing into a responsible person – a youngster can be equal with adults and be heard, and be an adult in that manner. No one will say "I know better because I'm 10 years older." And if you want, you can get those shoes that are initially too big to fill. (…) Quite often you're able to grow nicely into those shoes that were initially too big."
> (Appendix 2: Quotation 3.)

They described the opportunity to gain responsibility and trust from others as crucial, essential elements of volunteer work if it wants to be truly participatory.

The Rosette of Aims (see p. 5: Figure 1) was said encompass some important points that demonstrate how "everything affects everything", and that it helped this individual understand and develop their sense of goal-oriented planning. Their experience also relates to a self-awareness of one's presence in social situations. They described the realization thusly:

> "I think it's partly that self-awareness thing also; like, how I've now learned to know myself and how I act in situations and how I'd like to act in situations, and so I've started to think about those things on a conscious level – like what reasons there actually are behind the actions themselves in the camp facilitation process."
> (Appendix 2: Quotation 4.)

Being able to influence decision-making and planning can be an empowering process (Perkins & Zimmerman 1995). Additionally, inclusivity and group cohesion were seen to prevent burnout of individuals. Vecina et al (2013) concluded from their study that feeling engaged to the actions performed in volunteer work yields feelings of happiness for the volunteers.

5.2.2   Inclusion

Some of the interviewees described mutually similar experiences of a difficult background involving bullying and isolation, and that participation within Protu had helped them reflect on these negative experiences and to integrate to an accepting community of somewhat like-minded people. One described a sense of emotional healing due to them developing socially and gaining feelings of acceptance and meaningfulness. Another said the following about the atmosphere:

> "All of us crave help in some way, and within Protu's activities you will get help – in one way or another."
> (Appendix 2: Quotation 5.)

The atmosphere at the organization's events and activities was often described as accepting, positive, and inclusive. The threshold for taking more responsibility was said to be low, because of an open atmosphere where everyone with good intentions is welcomed, and where everyone understands that these activities are done with volunteer efforts and thus excessive pressure should not be put on individuals. One of the interviewees described how, as a camp counselor, they did not have to stress about whether they truly were a part of the group at the camp, because in this role they felt needed and included by default. Consequently, they were able to have a relaxed presence and to

give room for the others to express themselves, instead of feeling the need to vocally interject in order to be perceived as part of the group. They also described feeling like a "weirdo", but that that feeling has not been a negative thing within the organization. On the contrary, part of the acceptance that they felt was in their opinion due to that very feeling of weirdness; they felt as though the community within Protu values uniqueness and sees it as an opportunity for a person to bring something of their own to the community.

Other interviewees also emphasized an experience of feeling valuable and useful as an individual. Furthermore, personal motivation to give attention to others was also emphasized – not only through facilitating similar camp experiences for new camp participants, but also through being genuinely present for someone else. The interviewees wanted to actively promote the creation of a safe atmosphere where individuals could be themselves, but also question and discuss things openly.

Protu's tendency to examine itself critically and to consequently develop itself towards better ideals was considered a meaningful quality for an organization. Good discussions and dialogue were considered tools for understanding differences and thus being more open-minded towards others as well. Many felt a sense of togetherness within the organization; Protu was seen as a somewhat homogenous group of people where personal differences are welcomed, but completely incompatible values or values perceived as inherently malicious may not be integrated into the organization's set of values. Even though individuals and their personal values are different and unique, some unwritten as well as written goals and values are shared – this matter of fact was said to play a role on the atmosphere, inclusion, and closeness of the community. One interviewee brought up the idea that regularly interacting within one organization can influence people's thinking and homogenize the community, but that all experiences in an individual's life influence the development of their worldviews. They proceeded to explain that Protu also gives individuals various tools for examining those views, and thus individuals can be somewhat cognizant of the origins and reasoning of their views.

One interviewee discussed the fact that Prometheus camps are essentially "secluded" from the rest of society during the 7-day period of the camp. They said that this setting where there are no visitors and no direct interaction with "outsiders" – besides cell phone interaction and nowadays also internet connections – enhances the sense of community for the group, consisting of approximately a 7-person counselor team and about 15 camp

participants, plus one or two cooks. The interviewee also mentioned a sense of "escapism" where you are able to consider your life and thoughts through a new setting or viewpoint.

One individual described various types of a sense of togetherness, and that their personal way of experiencing togetherness had developed. First, they often say "us" and use the pronoun "we" when talking about the organization and some tendencies within it. Second, they described how camp counselor teams often develop a very deep sense of togetherness when planning and facilitating their camp. Their third example was from the board of the organization: a tight group where fair criticism is welcomed, but differences of opinion do not hurt your position in the "in-group", and that they can understand and appreciate the differing decisions and conclusions that their board "colleagues" want to make. Another interviewee also mentioned feeling that especially some years within the board the group develops a tight-knit group identity. The first example from the other interviewee also relates to a feeling from another individual: they described a sense of belonging within the organization that sometimes manifests as strangers having the courage to come and talk to you, merely due to the fact that they realized you are both members of the same organization. The organization was considered a strong connecting point between individuals.

5.2.3 Closeness

Most interviewees mentioned their appreciation for Protu's culture of closeness; the organization fosters a unique atmosphere of non-sexual physical and emotional closeness that manifests in – for example – a low threshold for hugging other participants and sometimes even cuddling. Hugging between males is also considered as normal as hugging between other combinations of genders. Hugging is claimed to promote an "increased production of endorphins which strengthen the body's immune system" (Forsell & Åström 2012).

This atmosphere of allowing hugging and other forms of physical closeness to be experienced in a safe environment promotes – according to the interviewees – a healthy relationship with the crucial human need for touch. In fact, studies have shown a negative correlation between touching and aggression: cultures where people touch each other more are less likely to produce aggressive individuals (Field n.d.). Protu emphasizes that closeness does not equal sexuality, and furthermore that consent is a crucial element of

any kind of closeness, not just sexual. The interviewees felt like they rarely – if ever – run into such a culture of non-sexual closeness within other communities, and that with this unique experience they had positively developed their relationship with the idea of closeness and affection.

> "(…) Closeness is not a taboo within Protu. 'Cause for me it used to be a very difficult thing for a very long time, and so this has helped. This kind of a "hugging culture". That in itself matters, but I also think it might be a thing that opens up new opportunities for many individuals; like, it creates a kind of trust, which in turn enables opening up to others, which enables social interaction."
> (Appendix 2: Quotation 6.)

Nowadays, many Americans – for example – are cautious when it comes to physical closeness outside the home, because many are taught that touching is not appropriate, and thus people fear lawsuits and judgment due to a sexualized view of touching (Field n.d.). However, "touch is not only critical for growth, development, communication, and learning but also serves for comfort, reassurance, and self-esteem" (Field n.d.), and thus it is important that societies develop a healthy relationship with intimacy. This view does not rule out the requirement for consent and respect, but merely welcomes a culture where beneficial closeness can flourish. The importance of hugging has been emphasized by professionals and academics, and a "National Hugging Day" has been proposed in USA and many other countries (Forsell & Åström 2012).

Touch is one of the most important sensory systems of human beings, and our skin is our largest sense organ. The sense of touch gives us messages even when other senses are not functioning, and it has proved its importance from the beginning of life and all the way through to the latest years of life. Many are aware of the importance of touch for infants and children, but touch remains an important part of life even as adults. A sense of physical feeling is not only important for primitive survival due to the ability to sense pain, pressure, temperature, and muscle movement, but the sense of physical feeling and tactile communication are also crucial for emotional and social wellbeing. Aggression and emotional maladjustment have been observed as resulting characteristics in monkeys that were deprived of physical closeness with their own kind. Studies have shown that children respond better to dealing with distress when their caregivers used tactile comforting methods in addition to verbal ones. (Field n.d.)

The interviewees felt like Protu offers possibilities for answering various human needs such as playfulness and closeness, and that the expression of these needs by adults

may often be frowned upon by society, whereas Protu promotes an atmosphere where adults are also allowed to be playful. Games were said to bring people together and promote familiarization.

5.2.4 Dialogue

David Bohm (1990) defines and describes dialogue thusly:

> "'Dialogue' comes from the Greek word *dialogos*. Logos means 'the word' or in our case we would think of the 'meaning of the word'. And *dia* means 'through' - it doesn't mean two. A dialogue can be among any number of people, not just two. Even one person can have a sense of dialogue within himself, if the spirit of the dialogue is present. The picture of image that this derivation suggests is of a *stream of meaning* flowing among and through us and between us. This will make possible a flow of meaning in the whole group, out of which will emerge some new understanding. It's something new, which may not have been in the starting point at all. It's something creative. And this *shared meaning* is the 'glue' or 'cement' that holds people and societies together. Contrast this with the word 'discussion', which has the same root as 'percussion' and 'concussion'. It really means to break things up. It emphasises the idea of analysis, where there may be many points of view. Discussion is almost like a Ping-Pong game, where people are batting the ideas back and forth and the object of the game is to win or to get points for yourself. Possibly you will take up somebody else's ideas to back up your own - you may agree with some and disagree with others - but the basic point is to win the game. That's very frequently the case in a discussion. In a dialogue, however, nobody is trying to win. Everybody wins if anybody wins. There is a different sort of spirit to it. In a dialogue, there is no attempt to gain points, or to make your particular view prevail. Rather, whenever any mistake is discovered on the part of anybody, everybody gains. It's a situation called win-win, in which we are not playing a game against each other but *with* each other. In a dialogue, everybody wins."

Bohm's description of dialogue is essential to understanding the nature of true dialogue, and furthermore to understand the nature of dialogue within Protu. Light-hearted discussions – which Bohm describes as more of a battling of views and opinions – can be had at camps, trainings, and events in situations when concrete conclusions or decisions need to be produced, but especially the kind of dialogue that happens at the camps tends to follow the idea of Bohm's description. In a dialogue, thoughts are shared in a safe and open environment, everyone is heard, and the outcome will often be a shared widened understanding of a certain topic, without any particular right or wrong answers to complete the initial question of interest.

Protu's values were praised by the interviewees: a culture of encouraging true dialogue is at the core of the organization, and that in turn requires an atmosphere of respect for

and appreciation of oneself, others, and the world. Trust and openness were also in-cluded. The camps' themes were perceived as important, because they were felt to en-compass many things that our lives are comprised of. One interviewee emphasized that they had always been shown appreciation for their efforts, both verbally and non-verbally. They also described receiving encouragement and true listening from other volunteers. A good deal of personal thoughts that people may have were said to be somewhat elu-sive and subconscious, but that engaging in dialogue will empower people towards con-sciousness of their own thinking and patterns of cognition. Some individuals mentioned that they have become more aware of their presence in social situations and within dia-logue; here are some quotations explaining that:

> "And then there's the fact that one can see discussions and group situations as group situations. Actually, I used to see discussions as contents where we're just developing some outcome, but after participating at Protu I've started to see that there's two personalities or two people in interaction, or more people. There's those who are quiet, those who talk, how states alter the situations, and…are we tired right now, or what."
> (Appendix 2: Quotation 7.)

> "It's difficult to say, I mean, one could've probably learned these things from life outside of Protu as well, but facilitating dialogue at Protu has inevitably made me conscious of these skills."
> (Appendix 2: Quotation 8.)

Especially the latter quotation describes how even though we can never be certain about which experiences the main actors behind some of our learned skills are, it can clearly be said that at least an awareness of those skills and thus a conscious development can be promoted through these volunteer activities.

The opportunity for development as a person, no matter how much experience or of what age you are, was a specifically emphasized point from the interviewees. They described development in the areas of social skills, emotional skills, maturing, personal opinions, world view, and philosophy of life. The interviewees appreciated the fact that, within Protu, individuals are encouraged to reflect on and evaluate their opinions and views on the world. This kind of reflection is often done through dialogue, and thus people also develop their social skills and discussion skills as they participate in a respectful atmos-phere of curious pondering where no ready-made answers are given by anyone. The organization's emphasis on true dialogue was highly praised by all of the interviewees. They wanted to encourage people towards questioning and critical thinking as cognitive tools to understand and better oneself and the world. Critical examination of our experi-ences and the world around us can promote an individual's empowerment to form their

own views and participate in their society (Perkins & Zimmerman 1995). Protu was described to be a rare platform for calm dialogue where opposing ideas can exist without a heated argument.

5.3   Personal Contribution

The feeling of having personally contributed to something meaningful and beneficial helps boost an individual's empowerment (Perkins & Zimmerman 1995), and the feeling of being able to contribute to a community seemed to be an important point for all interviewees. They were asked what they felt like they had given or contributed. Time, effort, initiative, and cooking were some of the most concrete things stated. However, most contributions were less straight-forward and of a more complex social or mental nature. These individuals felt like they had been helping others and listening to others, and one of them described a way of providing "direct personhood" by being actively present – by truly hearing others and caring about them in a non-hierarchical position. This person-to-person relationship is created intentionally and consciously, and that was considered valuable. This interviewee had experienced a similar sort of active presence from others, and thus realized its importance and how to pass it on by being present for others. They described trust as a crucial element of these relationships; you need to let your personality be open and public to some degree, and produce sincere reciprocity.

The interviewees' explanations of active presence are similar to a socio-pedagogical ideal: social pedagogues are expected to have an empathetic and dynamic approach to social interaction. A socio-pedagogical relationship is one where presence and interest are authentic, and a goal of the relationship is to promote the development of social skills and, furthermore, the building of strong relationships. The fact that all of the interviewees stated an interest in providing others with similar experiences to those that they had gained supports this connection between Protu and social pedagogy even further. (ThemPra n.d.)

Many, if not all, of the interviewees felt like their contribution through volunteering at Protu had been useful for society, youth communities, and Protu's community. It was said that, within Protu, young people get to experience and practice their skills of time-management, taking responsibility, stress management, and other skills that are as important in adulthood and in life. These qualities were considered good for the youth, for their im-

mediate social circles, and therefore good for society. Furthermore, one interviewee considered one aspect of their contribution to be the fact that they – as a long-time volunteer – can be a positive example for younger and newer individuals. They wanted to give room for others to flourish, and to encourage as well as support them. One mentioned wanting to make life easier for this community and the individuals in it.

5.4   Impact on Life and Things Gained

> "Protu impacts people's lives more than they probably even realize. Then again, saying that seems somewhat paradoxical if I claim to have realized it, but… Maybe I haven't realized everything yet!"
> (Appendix 2: Quotation 9.)

All interviewees agreed that their participation within Protu has influenced their lives. They were all asked to describe that influence, and the descriptions consisted of various positive effects. There were no negative effects mentioned, except for one individual mentioning the fact that sometimes they might get overwhelmed with the amount of responsibilities that they have gathered for themselves, or that they might momentarily feel stressed if multiple volunteer colleagues simultaneously fail to meet deadlines and requirements. The things and skills that the interviewees had learned or developed in themselves were said to positively impact their lives in the "outside world" as well because of – for example – understanding social relationships better. Many mentioned gaining a lot of friends and a new, supportive social network. This in turn had promoted a feeling of belonging and being a part of something.

Protu was felt to have had provided these individuals with a platform for positive development and growth. One described the organization as very big part of their life; they do not believe they would be the same person without these experiences, and they felt like they are now seen as a "whole person" instead of others fixating on merely a part of their identity. It was said that the organization had given a lot, but that the individual had also contributed a lot in return. Some said that they had gained "CV-worthy" work experiences – these experiences had helped some with getting into a school or in a job interview. Another one also described employees being impressed with their experience within Protu. The needs for closeness, affection, and intellectual discussion were said to have been answered for at least one of the individuals. Another one stated that Protu would not be Protu unless difficult topics were not sometimes discussed; this reflects the nature of having deep and meaningful dialogue.

5.4.1   Skills and Development as a Person

All interviewees mentioned wanting to learn, grow, and develop as a person. The development of social skills emerged as a strong recurring theme; the organization was considered a platform for social growth and for practicing social skills. Major examples of developed skills include: openness, courage (to try new things), group facilitation, social interaction, dialogue skills, negotiating, expressing and encountering opinions, problem-solving, emotional intelligence, listening, verbal and non-verbal communication, giving and receiving feedback, and cooperation. A development of emotional intelligence was seen to have influenced one individual's familial relations positively, another one said they learned to be a good friend, and others described a developed sense of empathy as well. This is turn had helped a third individual to learn to care about the whole world more. This individual also described how their goals as a volunteer had developed from somewhat egoistical interests towards wanting to provide the camp participants with something; they described feeling accomplished when they realize that they might have sparked an interest in societal issues among the camp participants. This shift in focus had started during the planning phase of a camp, and included a realization of not being the center of attention in the process, as well as a realization of them not being fully developed as a thinker – there is always more to learn.

One interviewee had realized that having different characteristics emerge in different situations does not mean that you are "faking" or putting on a show around some people – instead it had been a manifestation of their ability to adapt to different situations, and being able to encounter and interact with various diverse people. Another one described learning to see social settings as complex, dynamic situations of interaction. This had helped them develop a sensitivity to reading social situations. One described developed, more relaxed interaction skills that helped them encounter people as individuals, and understood that there is no need for invisible hierarchies between people.

Some other skills that the interviewees said to have developed were planning skills, writing skills, taking responsibility, budgeting skills, creating action reports and strategies, and flexibility as well as being able to tolerate uncertainty. Volunteering as a youngster can help develop organizational skills that others may only learn later in life. An individual who works in a technical field had understood that group dynamics, grouping, emotions, and social aspects are actually in a very central role in any human communities and in

unexpected contexts; these phenomena impact a group's effectiveness no matter the field of work.

An individual described how they had developed the courage to do new things and to be themselves due to all their experience and responsible roles within the organization:

> "I'm pretty sure that without Protu I would've taken a much easier and grayer route [in life]. (…) I bet I wouldn't be nearly as happy as I am now, because it could've taken 10 or 20 years to realize what I personally want in life."
> (Appendix 2: Quotation 10.)

5.4.2 Self-Esteem and Wellbeing

> Interviewer: "What's the meaning of Protu in your life?"
> Interviewee: "In fact, the most important [meaning] has been the fact that Protu has helped me in both turning points of my life. But especially after getting so much negative attention, Protu was like a targeted drug for that, being the exact opposite [kind of attention]. So, it's been a big part of my life, and I probably wouldn't be the same person without it."
> (Appendix 2: Quotation 11.)

The overall impact of Protu on one's life was considered positive and encouraging; strengthened self-esteem and self-confidence were immensely clearly shared experiences between all interviewees. One interviewee mentioned that they perceive a great deal of their self-esteem-promoting experiences to have been gained through this organization. An accepting environment was seen to help individuals accept themselves; the tendency to praise people was considered healthy and helpful. Others tones of feedback were also considered beneficial for development. These experiences of a strengthened sense of self-esteem applied to all areas of life, not just their role within the organization. This in turn had bettered the overall wellbeing of these individuals. One felt a sense of moral development that lead to them being a better person, and this in turn had bettered their perceived quality of life. Studies have linked volunteering and having social capital to subjective life satisfaction (Calvo et al 2012), and the findings of this case study seem to support that link. OECD (n.d.) defines social capital as "networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups". As per this definition, volunteering within Protu seems to be a strong candidate for promoting social capital. Furthermore, OECD describes a common division of the concept of social capital into three main categories:

> "**Bonds:** Links to people based on a sense of common identity ("people like us") – such as family, close friends and people who share our culture or ethnicity.
>
> **Bridges:** Links that stretch beyond a shared sense of identity, for example to distant friends, colleagues and associates.
>
> **Linkages:** Links to people or groups further up or lower down the social ladder."

Openness was mentioned as a social skill that had been developed through volunteering; the interviewees had felt encouraged to open up to others and socialize more deeply. Being vulnerable had become easier. Gaining essential positive attention was described as a "saving element" in one individual's life. Openness lead many to a more relaxed presence and a grown courage to exploring life, whether it be through simple approaches such as experimenting with a more boldly colored wardrobe or in other ways. These findings seem to suggest an enhanced confidence, and confidence in turn can promote wellbeing.

Social integration through volunteering has been proven to have a positive impact on mental health due to enhanced self-esteem and self-confidence. Volunteering can also boost an empowering sense of being able to impact the world around us – this in turn can combat depression. Therefore, increased life satisfaction does not seem to be a farfetched development. (Wilson 2000.)

A developed sense of personal presence was described in other ways as well. An individual described sensitively understanding various aspects of one's presence in a room and in a group, and better understanding how other people receive you in social situations. These experiences had led to positive self-awareness and the ability to better control their own presence and read others. Self-awareness also helped to reflect on one's own feelings and being able to express them to others. Working methods are another possible for development through self-awareness. Developing concrete skills had been a tool for dealing with success and failure: success brought feelings of accomplishment and failures did not seem like the end of the world.

An individual explained how they nowadays feel more comfortable alone in their own company, and that they feel more courage to make decisions that reflect their true desires and goals. They considered self-awareness to be a major contributor to these areas of growth, because – they said – they need to understand themselves in order to know what they want, and knowing what they truly want is an important part of leading their life the way they wish to. These elements describe a developed sense of making sense of

one's world and taking control over one's own story. These are examples of an individual's empowerment. (ThemPra n.d.; Rauhala 2013.)

Some described the organization having a mature stance on health, disabilities, and mental health: mental illnesses and other disabilities are not seen as something that you either have or you do not – instead, people are open and eager to discuss and learn from other experiences even on these topics. One individual found it empowering how after being able to disclose their state of mental health and diagnosis to others, they did not see or treat this individual any different afterwards – they merely listened and discussed, and continued to support and like the person as they had before. An open atmosphere in this matter promotes important encouragement and empowerment of individuals, and destigmatizes the topic of mental health. The WHO has created a European Mental Health Action Plan, because reducing stigmatization of mental health and mental illness could fight discrimination and exclusion and therefore promote mental wellbeing of individuals (World Health Organization n.d.).

> "I don't know if I'd be alive without Protu. I'd say that I wouldn't be alive without Protu and the people I've found there."
> (Appendix 2: Quotation 12.)

The most important aims of social pedagogic practice can be summarized to wellbeing, happiness, holistic learning, (pedagogic) relationship, and empowerment. The aims of social pedagogy resemble the experiences in described in the results of this study; Protu is not an organization with professional social pedagogues working for them, but the activities and outcomes can surely be seen to promote a socio-pedagogical viewpoint of community and wellbeing. (ThemPra n.d.)

American psychologist Martin Seligman (2011, pp. 16-20) summarizes the concept of wellbeing into PERMA: positive emotion, engagement, (positive) relationships, meaning, and accomplishments. Positive emotions have often been described in this thesis as a perceived result of participation in volunteer activities, and a pleasant life of life satisfaction have been linked to volunteering in studies as well. Pleasure is often felt in the moment, whereas the state for engagement or flow sensation is usually retrospective – we categorize an experience as nice or wonderful afterwards. Meaning refers to a belief of contributing to something beneficial – from the doer's perspective or from the observers' perspectives. All interviewees considered their contribution to the organization to be beneficial, and therefore it is an element of the actions that promote their wellbeing. The

meaning of positive relationships is somewhat self-evident: humans are social animals, and we require enough positive social interaction for our wellbeing's sake. Lastly, feelings of accomplishment or achievement help empower an individual to feel a sense of wellbeing.

6   Conclusion

The initial assumption of this study was that participating in volunteer work would have an impact on one's life. That impact was attempted to be examined through interview discussions and relevant theoretical frameworks. Furthermore, reasons for commitment and motivation to continue volunteering were assessed. Six individuals were separately interviewed for about an hour concerning their experiences and perceptions on their motivation as well as the impact they consider their volunteering had had on their lives. Questions were asked about perceived connections between volunteering at Prometheus Camp Association and the development of the individuals' skills, wellbeing, and self-esteem. Interview audio files were transcribed, the data was categorized, and then further analyzed. The data was later connected to supporting theory and research.

The data confirmed the initial assumption: the interviewed volunteers felt a strong connection between their volunteer work and various developed skills, benefits, and boosted self-esteem. Social skills were considered to have developed immensely through participatory volunteer work; some perceived reasons for this development included having a platform for practicing, as well as gaining self-awareness over one's thoughts, actions, and presence in social situations. Various other skills had also been developed in the midst of volunteering, including organizational skills, courage, flexibility, responsibility, and planning skills. All of these effects had positively impacted the individuals' personal and social lives within and outside of the organization.

Inclusivity and a sense of belonging are important factors of human wellbeing. These qualities were described to be present within the organization's activities. The possibility for non-sexual, platonic touch and physical closeness was considered an important aspect of the organization's atmosphere; the interviewees considered these qualities having had a meaningful effect on their lives, because they had been able to develop their ideas of social interaction and closeness. Furthermore, these qualities helped to answer

the individuals' basic human needs for closeness and affection. The importance of touch and hugging were further supported and suggested by external references and research.

Social situations within the organization were considered strongly non-hierarchical, and true dialogue was praised as the "crown jewel" of activities. Individuals considered Prometheus Camp Association a magnificent platform for social, emotional, and intellectual development; the methods and values of the organization strongly resemble socio-pedagogical ideals and methods – these ideals essentially aim towards empowerment. All participants also considered having contributed to the society in a beneficial manner, through one-on-one interaction with other individuals and groups. A sense of being able to influence one's surroundings further promotes empowerment and wellbeing of individuals.

The findings of this case study have already been perceived as useful for the future of the organization's further research on its own practices and societal impact. This thesis would provide interested audiences – such as international cooperators – with an overview and an understanding of the nature of volunteering within Prometheus Camp Association as well as the benefits that its practices can provide on an individual, a social, and a societal level.

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Interview Questions and Themes

Interviews conducted by Aino Otala (2016-2017).

At least the following questions were discussed in all interviews. This list of questions and topics worked as a guideline for the interviews, and the list may have been expanded during individual interviews. The interviewees could interpret the questions in ways meaningful to them, and the focus was on their subjective perception.

1. Background info: What NGO active / volunteer roles have you had within Protu?

2. Additional background info: Have you volunteered for other organizations?
    a. Describe the work and your motivation to do it.

3. Why did you originally join Protu?

4. Why did you continue volunteering within Protu?
    a. What motivated you?
    b. How about now: if you continue – why?

5. What expectations do you have when working with Protu?
    a. What do you want to gain?
    b. What have you gained?
    c. What do you want to give? / How do you want to contribute?
    d. How have you contributed?

6. Has participating within Protu had an impact on your life?
    a. How?

7. In this kind of participatory volunteer work, what elements have you found to be most important (to you)?
    a. Why?

8. Do you feel like participating within Protu or these elements have affected your quality of life?

      a. How?

9. Has participating within Protu affected your self-esteem?
      a. How?

10. Do you feel a sense of togetherness or belonging within this organization?
      a. Describe.

11. Have you developed new skills because of volunteering within Protu?
      a. Describe.
      b. Have you developed your pre-existing skills because of volunteering within Protu?
      c. Describe.

Direct Quotations from Interviews

Quotation 1: ”Koska se on niinkun antoisaa itselle, ja se on antoisaa mulle itselle niinkun toisaalt sen älyllisen kehityksen puolesta ja toisaalta niitten sosiaalisten suhteiden puolesta. Ja sitten mä koetan hieman parantaa maailmaa niinkun viemällä semmosia tunteellisia ja maailmankatsomuksellisia elementtejä mitä itse pidän tärkeänä niin levittämällä niitä.”

Quotation 2: ”Halusin antaa samaa muille ihmisille. (…) Jokaisella pitäis olla mahdollisuus saada olla just sellainen kuin on, ja tulla hyväksytyksi.”

Quotation 3: “[Asia jonka koen tärkeäksi:] Vastuuseen kasvaminen – nuori saa olla tasaveroinen aikuisten kanssa ja tulla kuulluksi ja olla aikuinen siinä mielessä. Kukaan ei sano et ”Mä tiedän paremmin ku sä ku mä oon 10v vanhempi.” Ja saa niitä liian isoja saappaita jos haluaa. (...) Aika usein niihin liian isoihin kenkiin kasvaa aika hyvin”

Quotation 4: ”Mä veikkaan et se on sitä itsetietosuusasiaa kans, et nyt ku on oppinu silleen tuntemaan itseään ja miten toimii tilanteissa ja miten haluaisi toimii tilanteissa, niin sit niinkun on lähteny ajatuksen tasolla miettii noita asioita, et mitkä siellä leiritoiminnassa on sen itse tekojen ja toiminnan takana.”

Quotation 5: “Kaikki meistä jollain tavalla kaipaa apua ja siellä protutoiminnassa sitä kyllä sai, tavalla tai toisella.”

Quotation 6: ”(...) Protussa läheisyys ei oo tabu. Et koska mulle se oli hyvin pitkään hyvin vaikee asia ja tavallaan toi on niinku auttanu. Et tämmönen niinku halailukulttuuri. Niin sil on itsessään merkitystä mut tota mä luulen et se monelle saattaa olla sit semmonen niinkun et sen kautta avautuu sitten muita mahdollisuuksia, et se luo semmosta jonkinlaista luottamusta, joka sitte taas mahdollistaa avautumista, joka mahdollistaa sosiaalista vuorovaikutusta.”

Quotation 7: ”Protu vaikuttaa ihmisten elämään enemmän ku ne ehkä itekään tajuu. Tietysti toi on aika paradoksaalista et jos mä olisin ite ton tajunnu mutta... Ehken mä oo viel tajunnu kaikkee!”

Quotation 8: "Sit semmosta et osaa nähä niinkun keskustelut ja ryhmätilanteet niinkun ryhmätilanteina. Oikeestaan ennen mä näin keskustelut niinku sisältöinä jotka tässä nyt sisällöllisesti kehitellään jotain, ja sit protutoiminnan jälkeen mä oon alkanu näkee et siin on kaks persoonaa, tai kaks ihmistä jotka interaktioi, tai useempia, sit semmosii ketkä on hiljaa, ketkä on äänes, miten tila muuttaa sitä ja...ollaaks nyt väsyneitä vai mitä, niinku."

Quotation 9: "Vaikee sanoa, et varmaa näitäki asioit ois oppinu muustaki elämästä, mut Protun kautta ku on vetäny keskusteluja ni niist on tullu väistämättä tietoseks.

Quotation 10: "Varmaan ilman Protua mä olisin menny paljon helpompaa ja harmaampaa polkua [elämässä]. (...) Veikkaan että en olis läheskään näin onnellinen ku ois voinu mennä se 10 tai 20 vuotta tajuta että mitä ite haluaa."

Quotation 11: "Tosiaan mulle ehkä se kaikkein tärkein [merkitys] on ollu se, ne molemmat kerrat ku elämän käännekohdissa Protu on auttanu. Mut varsinki se et just ku on saanu paljon kielteist huomioo, ni se miten Protu oli niinku täsmälääke tähän oikeestaan, et just päinvastaista [huomiota]. Ni se on ollu tosi iso osa mun elämää, enkä ois varmaan sama ihminen ilman sitä."

Quotation 12: "En tiedä olisinko hengissä ilman Protua. Väittäisin etten olis hengissä ilman Protua ja niitä ihmisiä joita oon löytäny sitä kautta."