

Spiritual Agency and Sustainability Transitions
Exploring Food Practices in Three Hare Krishna Eco-Communities

Tamas Lestar

Doctor of Philosophy in Management Studies

Essex Business School
University of Essex

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“You may want sustainable development but you cannot have it. Humanity as a whole has developed enough. We are currently using fifty percent more resources than this planet has at its disposal. Logically, we cannot develop further. Rather than develop, if we want a future for everyone, we may need to redistribute wealth, and then cut back fifty percent. That is sustainable. But you have to give up the idea of further development. Be satisfied with what you have. Look up. See the top of that tree? Trees grow only so high. They cannot just keep growing and growing and growing. They know better than we that if they grow too high, they will topple over.” (Facebook video message by Sivarama Swami)

“Beyond the provision of nutrition and shelter, prosperity consists in our ability to participate in the life of society, in our sense of shared meaning and purpose and in our capacity to dream. We’ve become accustomed to pursuing these goals through material means. Freeing ourselves from that constraint is the basis for change.” (Tim Jackson: *Prosperity Without Growth*)

“Emissions can be substantially lowered through changes in consumption patterns [...] and dietary change.” (IPCC, 2014)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	1
GLOSSARY	2
PREFACE.....	4
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	6
Defining the Problem: Increasing Meat Consumption	6
Seeking Solutions: Communities in Focus	9
Eco-Spirituality, Worldviews and Environmental Behaviour	13
Research Aims and Questions	18
Thesis Structure	24
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW. SPIRITUALITY AND HUMAN AGENCY IN THE SUSTAINABILITY TRANSITIONS LITERATURE	27
Spirituality, Ecology and Sustainability Transitions	27
Structure and Agency in the Sustainability Transitions Literature.....	35
Spirituality in the Sustainability Transitions Literature	49
Social Practice Theory.....	56
Conclusions	63
CHAPTER 3. METHODS AND FIELDWORK.....	68
Research Design	69
Summary.....	94
CHAPTER 4. ISKCON	97
Spiritual Practices	97
History	99
ISKCON Today	108
CHAPTER 5. KARUNA BHAVAN, LESMAHAGOW, SCOTLAND (CASE 1).....	112
Introducing the Farm	112
Love and Devotion. Hare Krishna Prasadam and the Food Cycle	121
I Am a Wwoofer. Exploring the Farm and Diet Through the Eyes of Volunteers	128
From Omnivorous Hippy to Vegetarian Devotee.....	135
CHAPTER 6. THE BHAKTIVEDANTA MANOR, WATFORD, UK (CASE 2).....	143
Introducing the Farm	143
I Am a Cook. Food Sharing Activities	153
From City-Accountant to Hare Krishna Monk.....	162
CHAPTER 7. KRISHNA VALLEY, SOMOGYVAMOS, HUNGARY (CASE 3).....	167
Introducing the Farm	167
Ecological Achievements and Daily Management.....	180

Cow Protection in Action	189
Conversion.....	198
CHAPTER 8. DISCUSSION	203
Conversion.....	209
Spiritual Food: Prasadam.....	216
Spiritual Communities and Sustainability Transitions	226
Making Sense of Large Phenomena: Competing Diets	232
CHAPTER 9. CONCLUSIONS	241
Contributions	254
Limitations and Future Research	262
REFERENCES	266
APPENDICES	289
Appendix 1. Interviews.....	289
Appendix 2. Ethical Approval and Interview Consent Form	290
Appendix 3. Sample of the Coding Process	300
Appendix 4. Photographs.....	306

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores connections between spirituality, diet and system-wide Sustainability Transitions. The pivotal role of food in greenhouse gas emissions is widely acknowledged across disciplines, yet it is under-researched by Sustainability Transitions scholars. Likewise, while sustainable diets comprising of less meat are often associated with spiritual and ethical beliefs, the transitional agency of worldviews has not been conceptualised in the Sustainability Transitions literature. To address this gap, eco-spiritual practices are investigated to understand how vegetarianism is maintained in spiritual communities. Enabling and disabling factors are analysed for potentials of diffusion into broader levels of society.

I present findings of qualitative research and fieldwork, which included participant observation and in-depth interviewing in Hare Krishna communities in Europe. Three eco-farms were selected to represent different features of spirituality and ecological commitment. Data collection and analysis were guided by Social Practice Theory which enables close-up scrutinising of eco-spiritual practices.

Findings reveal a firm durability of food practices, which contributes to the longevity of Hare Krishna eco-farms. Motivated by their distinct worldview, believers advocate simplification over technological improvements to serve ecological sustainability. Extensive outreach via eco-tourism and food sharing programmes demonstrate a working alternative to development and lifestyles supported by an economics based on unlimited growth. While these attract visitors in high numbers, adherence to religious culture in the form of dress, gender roles and language use may slow the diffusion process into wider society. Lock-in mechanisms in the outside world also work against the up-scaling of less-meat dietary practices, making the work of vegetarian advocacy less effective.

By exploring and analysing Krishna practices, this thesis makes two key contributions. First: the conception of agency for change in Sustainability Transitions frameworks is extended by the inclusion of spirituality, worldviews, and their corresponding lifestyle practices. Second: Hare Krishna communities are shown to illustrate a ‘new economics’ which posits demand-side simplifications as a precondition for systemic change.

GLOSSARY

Ahimsa: Same as Karma-free (in Sanskrit – *Himsa*: harming. *Ahimsa*: non-harming)

Bhagavad Gita: the most referenced Scripture for Hare Krishna devotees

Conversion: A sudden or gradual change in worldview, way of thinking and lifestyle.

Eco-spirituality: Religious or non-religious spirituality manifesting pro-environmental attitudes and practices

Intentional communities: the term in eco-culture studies refers to communities formed purposefully on well-defined and still maintained goals and/or principles.

ISKCON: International Society of Krishna Consciousness

Karma: the sum of a person's actions deciding his/her fate

Karma-free: That does not bring about bad karma. Free from violence.

Krishna, Kṛṣṇa: avatar (incarnation) of a Hindu God.

Murti(s): Semi-God(s) in Hindu faiths. Embodiment of object representing deity(s).

Permaculture: the development of agricultural ecosystems by using more sustainable and self-sufficient cultivating methods.

Prasad, Prasadam: Hare Krishna food; food offered to Krishna before consumption.

Voluntary Simplicity: A set of attributes relating to less CO₂ intensive life-style practices. E.g. frugality in diet, shopping, dress, travel, etc.

Spirituality: The search for the sacred.

Srila Prabhupad: ISKCON's late founder, followed and worshipped as Krishna's incarnation by devotees.

Wwoofers, wwoofing: Wwoofing [wu:fɪŋ] is a word mostly known to a generation of young people who are interested in World Wide Opportunities On Organic Farms. A wwoofer is someone who spends some weeks or months as a volunteer on one of the hundreds of eco-farms listed in the scheme worldwide

PREFACE

This research interest is based on decades of direct involvement in the dietary movement of a transnational Christian community. Although the religiosity or spirituality of spiritual groups is generally seen as advantageous in maintaining or promoting more sustainable practices in Sustainability Transitions research (Mohamad, Idris and Mamat, 2012; Cherry, 2013), little is said about how specific spiritualities shape practices within and outside community circles. To address this gap, Hare Krishna eco-farms offered ample opportunities to explore connections between a distinctive Krishna spirituality and environmental behaviour. My own involvement in meat-free practices was primarily motivated by health benefits, whereas the Krishna diet is based on messages of ethics and compassion, which opened before me new areas of exploration. Both globally and in a European context, Krishna believers have an extensive network of spiritual eco-initiatives, and vegetarianism is an absolute requirement in their movement. No other organisation in Europe has reached similar level of ecological commitment in terms of pro-environmental practice (including diet) and the number of established eco-farms. These factors and a relatively easy access made the community an optimal choice for research. I had had no personal contact with Krishna believers prior to undertaking the work.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Defining the Problem: Increasing Meat Consumption

This thesis is about understanding connections between diet, spirituality and Sustainability Transitions through an exploration of eco-spiritual practices in Hare Krishna communities. In this section I present the problem of meat consumption from an ecological perspective, which explains why studying meat-free food practices is significant for Sustainability Transitions.

Climate change is causing serious havoc in the world. Science, governments and NGOs equally call for urgent and simultaneous changes in complex trajectories that enhance and interrelate with each other on multiple levels of society (e.g. Boyd, 2011). There is unanimous agreement among Sustainability Transitions scientists that in order to reach targeted emissions reductions, humanity needs to go through several interconnected pathways of systemic transitions (Elzen et al., 2004; Van den Bergh and Bruinsma, 2008; Grin et al., 2010; Geels, 2011). It is widely agreed that one of the most important areas where change is desperately needed is meat production and consumption (IPCC, 2016).

The ecological significance of what people eat can hardly be disputed. The majority of publications addressing the theme from an ecological perspective attest to the idea that reduced meat consumption results in increased sustainability, and vice versa. Statistical figures show strong correlations between dietary patterns, GHG emissions, water use, and health. In a recent article Aleksandrowicz et al. (2016: 1) systematically reviewed evidence

on changes in GHG emissions, land use, and water use, from shifting current dietary intakes to environmentally sustainable dietary patterns. [The authors found] 14 common sustainable dietary patterns across reviewed studies, with reductions as high as 70–80% of GHG emissions and land use, and 50% of water use (with medians of about 20–30% for these indicators across all studies) possible by adopting sustainable dietary patterns. Reductions in environmental footprints were generally proportional to the magnitude of animal-based food restriction.

The review, which is the most recent and comprehensive to date (ibid. 7), is also the first to compare impacts in land use, water use and GHG emissions. The authors extracted 210 scenarios from 63 studies, of which 197 showed a

reduction in environmental impacts when switching from baseline to alternative dietary patterns. [...] The largest environmental benefits across indicators were seen in those diets which most reduced the amount of animal-based foods, such as vegan (first place in terms of benefits for two environmental indicators), vegetarian (first place for one indicator), and pescatarian (second and third place for two indicators). The ranking of sustainable diet types showed similar trends for land use and GHG emissions. (ibid. 5)

The study then goes on to relate diets to health factors. The authors found that veganism, followed by vegetarianism showed reduced mortality risk compared to meat-based, dominant diets (ibid. 8). In its conclusion, the paper claims that there is

an increasing body of evidence on which to base the integration of environmental priorities into dietary recommendations. Several of these dietary patterns are already promoted through public health efforts, such as the healthy dietary guidelines, the Mediterranean diet [...], and the New Nordic Diet [...]. The production of food (i.e. the growing of crops and raising of livestock) is the primary driver of environmental impacts, as opposed to later stages such as transport and processing [...]. While local and seasonal diets have advantages such as protecting local economies and crop diversity, efforts to reduce dietary-related environmental impacts should focus on reducing animal-based foods in high-consuming societies.

In accordance with the above, in another recent review paper Wynes and Nicholas (2017) explored the most effective actions to reduce personal greenhouse gas emissions. A plant-based diet is one out of four high impact actions the authors recommend for governmental and educational consideration. (The other three are: having one fewer child, living car-free, and avoiding air travel). According to the

authors and the reviewed papers, these actions have a much greater potential than other widely promoted strategies like recycling or changing light-bulbs for example (ibid. 1). They claim that the governmental communications of the US, Canada, Australia and the EU tend to focus recommendations on lower-impact channels and incremental changes, while the most effective ways – such as switching to less-meat diets – remain in the background.

The importance of dietary issues is also emphasised by Lang and Wells (2015) who assert: “one thing is clear: no change in food means no gain in climate change prevention”.¹ But system giants – explain the authors – seem reluctant to change, and current food politics create a conducive environment for them to follow business as usual scenarios. The reason mentioned in the article is that intervention in the food system is not attractive to politicians as it either interferes with consumers’ tastes or with the representatives of the agri-business. Compared with energy-related topics for example, food is significantly underrepresented at climate change meetings, and was ‘barely touched upon’ during the COP conference in Paris in 2015 (ibid.).

At the same time, a growing alliance of grassroots initiatives – churches, NGOs, eco-movements and online communities – unite their interest in calling into question the current food system, and industrial farming in particular. However, despite offering viable less-meat alternatives to consumers, and despite the visible expansion of awareness and practice, both the overall and per capita demand for meat is steadily increasing globally. According to the WHO (2003) and the OECD/FAO (2017), meat production and consumption will continue rising in the upcoming decades. Transition countries like China that were once exemplary for their healthy diet based on an

¹ The elephant in the room at Paris climate talks: why food production must change.
<http://theconversation.com/the-elephant-in-the-room-at-paris-climate-talks-why-food-production-must-change-51526>

abundant supply of legumes, green vegetables, and a very limited supply of animal proteins, have begun to – through an industrial ‘rise’ – emulate the Western lifestyle and diet. China, India and Brazil are taking the lead on this path, and it is projected that other low or mid-income countries will also follow suit (WHO, 2003). Urbanisation is understood by both above statistical sources to be one of the main driving forces behind this trend, as urban lifestyle favours the use of “increased proteins from animal sources” (OECD, 2017). Although the rate of projected growth in meat consumption is to slow down between 2015 and 2030 (FAO, 2003), and some countries may have already reached a point of decline in per capita consumption, the growth of overall meat production gives cause for serious concern. Livestock alone is responsible for 7.1 Gigatons of CO₂-equivalent per year, which is 14.5% of all anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions (Gerber et al., 2013: 15). Putting health impacts and animal welfare aside and considering only the greenhouse gas emissions generated by the livestock industry, the societal challenge is how to mitigate climate change while global demand for meat increases year after year.

Seeking Solutions: Communities in Focus

Seeking solutions for climate-related dilemmas, a sizeable body of literature in the social sciences takes eco-communities as units of interest for sustainability research. Within the Sustainability Transitions field, the chief theoretical background for this thesis, community initiatives are becoming frequent targets of investigation. Low-carbon communities are conceptualised as a means to study, model or instigate change (Smith et al., 2010; Seyfang and Haxaltine, 2010). Strategic Niche Management – for example – combined with the so-called Multi-Level Perspective, serves to guide or

analyse technical innovations in the context of Sustainability Transitions (Kemp, Schot and Hoogma, 1998; Schot and Geels, 2008; Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2010). One basic tenet of the theory is that by providing a community (called ‘niche’) with the opportunity to experiment with novel socio-technical implementations, policy makers and stakeholders can probe if certain innovations are feasible to be widely introduced, emulated and diffused. The theory was first intended to address technological and market-driven initiatives, but later it was extended to analyse grass-roots social innovations (e.g. Seyfan and Haxeltine, 2010). Strategic Niche Management in its early phase conceptualised change as an aggregate outcome of niche duplications, and claimed that “regime shifts would come about through bottom–up processes of niche expansion” (Schot and Geels, 2008: 547). Later, partly drawing on criticism offered by Shove and Walker (2007: 764), theorists of the Multi-Level Perspective adjusted this position by stating that change takes place by the diverse and interrelated co-evolution of ongoing processes within and across societal layers. Still, despite the complex, interrelated, and often contingent nature of change, community as niche remains an important subject of Sustainability Transitions research.

As a late achievement of a related field, Transformative Social Innovation theory was developed to analyse the transformative impact of transnational networks and local community initiatives, which are regarded as the intermediaries to translate innovation into broader society (Avelino et al., 2014). TSI is conceptualised by drawing on various theories addressing issues of change, with Niche Management, Multi-Level Perspective and Social Practice Theory among them. By the simultaneous application of selected elements of these theories, Avelino et al. (ibid.) offer an empirically tested framework for analysing social innovations in their relation to systemic change. Transformative Social Innovation puts forward the need for unpacking the dynamics

between what it calls game-changers (e.g. climate change), transformative discourses (e.g. low-carbon transition), social innovations (communities) and systemic changes in selected domains such as health, food, agriculture, energy and transport.

Another important area to mention briefly in the context of community research is that of policy-related literature. As earlier efforts to combat climate change through improved resource management are claimed inefficient, the attention of some theorists turn towards ideas of demand-side reductions (Christie, 2010: xiv). Concerning policy-making, there is a range of approaches across scientific schools and policy actions in terms of the nature of intervention through supplying information, nudging, encouraging participation and/or changing practice arrangements. Still, while there is a division among scholars on what constitutes good or bad practice in terms of policy intervention, there is a wide agreement about the significance of grassroots community practices for social change (Avelino and Kunze, 2009; Smith et al., 2010; Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2010).

Finally, the role of communities is foregrounded in a body of literature which calls into question the sustainability of the current economic system. Addressing the perceived inadequacy of the growth-based economy to enable the system and its citizens to change, a so-called ‘new economics’ is conceptualised to promote a radical system change and an entire turn in considering what economic development means (Seyfang, 2009). As an alternative to technological innovation, proponents of a ‘postgrowth’ economy argue for change in simplifying and de-carbonising practice rather than incrementally improving systems of provision. A sharing economy is visualised, among other concepts, and communities already manifesting its practices (time sharing, car sharing, local money) have become objects of scientific research (e.g. Seyfang, 2009). Apart from sharing, there are other characteristics for the proposed economics,

which is also referenced as ‘stationary’, ‘steady-state economics’, ‘meta-economics’ or ‘de-growth’ (also ‘agrowth’), depending on the aspects highlighted by different scholars (Daly, 1972; Schumacher, 1973; Jackson, 2009, D’Alisa, Demaria and Kallis, 2014; Ikerd, 2016a). These scholars often accentuate the societal and ecological significance of intrinsic – at times explicitly spiritual – values in contrast to materialistic ones. Simplicity, frugality, service, belonging, affiliation become crucial factors for change towards a sustainable society. Jackson (2009: 149) holds to the view that people

with higher intrinsic values are both happier and have higher levels of environmental responsibility than those with materialistic values. This finding is extraordinary because it suggests there really is a kind of double or triple dividend in a less materialistic life: people are both happier and live more sustainably when they favour intrinsic goals that embed them in family and community.

In Jackson’s proposed economics based on prosperity without growth, simplicity and simplification is one of the key factors in combating the consumerism which is encouraged by the economic and social system (Jackson, 2009: 149-151). However, he claims that individual efforts towards simplicity are more likely to succeed when they are embedded in community form. Successful eco-communities are often though not exclusively characterised by spiritual philosophies (ibid. 151). The problem with this, Jackson assumes, is that the spiritual basis does not appeal to everyone. In other words, eco-spiritual communities may be too exclusive to attract broad segments of society to follow their pro-environmental practices. On the other hand, secular intentional communities “seem less resistant to the incursions of consumerism” (ibid.), which may make them less consistent in practice and lead to their failure. To address this dilemma in this thesis, the Hare Krishna community provides a case for investigating the characteristics of eco-spiritual practices from the aspects of consistency and endurance.

But at this point, before outlining the research questions in detail, I need to explain what eco-spirituality for this study means.

Eco-Spirituality, Worldviews and Environmental Behaviour

Although Hare Krishna eco-spirituality could be explained by a few words in religious terms, the Krishna movement for this thesis is an empirical example only to raise theoretical questions about all types of spiritual agency for Sustainability Transitions. In my proposition, any type of religious or non-religious spirituality (and the lack of it) could be evaluated in relation to environmental practice. It has long been debated what religion and spirituality exactly stand for and how they relate to each other. For the purposes of this thesis I follow Pargament et al. (2013: 14) who define spirituality as “the search for the sacred” while religion as “the search for significance that occurs within the context of established institutions that are designed to facilitate spirituality” (ibid. 15). Obviously, the term ‘sacred’ is very broad and may include God, higher powers, transcendence, immanence and other factors that are deemed spiritual by its followers. In a simplified approach, a spiritual person is who claims himself or herself to be so. Reducing the term to eco-spirituality is helpful, but still does not define a homogeneous community which could be exclusively called eco-spiritual. In his book entitled *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future*, Bron Taylor (2010) identifies several diverse and at times eccentric communities that endeavour to save the planet on grounds of their spiritual beliefs. (On the other end of the scale we may find spiritualities, for example the ‘prosperity gospel’, which manifest little or no interest in environmental attitudes or behaviours.) But this diversity becomes less problematic for this present work, the aim of which is not to unify eco-spiritual factions but to uncover the nature of eco-spirituality in an empirically situated, specific context in the Hare Krishna movement.

Despite the eco-spiritual diversity, some scholars (Carroll, 2004; Witt, 2011) offer a few characteristics describing a so-called ‘contemporary spirituality’, some of which are shared by the Hare Krishna faith as well as other ecological movements (e.g. deep ecology). Witt (2011) elaborates on contemporary spirituality's pro-environmental attributes. Among them are listed the rehabilitation of nature, including an ethical consideration for animals (vegetarianism) and alternative ways of ‘Easternization’ (Campbell, 2007) of the West in terms of reverencing nature. Adherents of this spirituality often emphasize interconnectedness (Witt, 2011: 1059), according to which an emotionally imbued connectivity with nature and the other beings goes hand in hand with a service-ethic that is constitutive of respect and care for the environment. Another prominent characteristic of the movement is the intensive acknowledgement and sense of urgency and imminent crises concerning the state of the world, a way of thinking that naturally reflects pro-environmental orientation.

Contemporary spirituality – not unlike deep ecology and the Hare Krishna vision – is often associated with a drive for individual development. According to Witt (ibid.), spiritual adherents tend not to address problems superficially, as mere symptoms, but as results of deeper causes. An endeavour to work on the inner self orients adherents towards spiritual fulfilments rather than materialistic ones, thus dislocating priorities from the industrialism and consumerism so often associated with mainstream tendencies.

Contemporary eco-spirituality is also characterized by the potential for brave and creative innovations, a point which is well emphasized in the literature (Ray and Anderson, 2000: 4; Taylor, 1999: 280, 281), and which is one of the main hinges of the Sustainability Transitions literature. According to the latter, prior to transitions, experimental niches are formed where new ideas and innovations can be tested before

spreading them further into more mainstream levels and segments of society (e.g. Geels, 2011).

However, despite all these advantages and potentials for Sustainability Transitions, scholars referenced below also outline some risks and pitfalls. One of such risks may be an overwhelming self-concern as thoughts may be directed too far away from the material outside towards the self. An extreme emphasis on the inner spiritual work at the expense of severing oneself from society and the other may lead to the danger of extreme self-centeredness (Lasch, 1978: 4). As Charles Taylor (1989: 508) puts it:

A society of self-fulfillers, whose affiliations are more and more seen as revocable, cannot sustain the strong identification with the public community which public freedom needs. [...] The primacy of self-fulfilment, particularly in its therapeutic variants, generates the notion that the only associations one can identify with are those formed voluntarily and which foster self-fulfilment, such as the 'lifestyle enclaves' in which people of similar interests cluster. [...] Politically, this bit of the 'counter-culture' fits perfectly into the instrumental, bureaucratic world it was thought to challenge. It strengthens it. (Quoted by Witt 2011: 1061)

For others, however (e.g. Carroll, 2004; Ikerd, Gamble and Cox, 2014), it is exactly some forms of counter-culture, represented by contemporary spirituality as described above, that makes it a significant theme for environmental research.

Spirituality, as we may see, offers plenty of points for transitional considerations. By briefly referencing contemporary spirituality I have only illustrated the dynamics of a specific type of eco-spirituality that can be related to Sustainability Transitions. The point to propose is that eco-spirituality offers a special object of investigation when change towards more sustainable practices is in focus. Indeed, initial research has already found correlations between worldviews and environmental behaviours. In an attempt to quantitatively explore the connections between spirituality and sustainable choices, Witt, Boer and Boersema (2014: 41) found that personal worldview has a strong correlation with sustainable behaviours. In their study, spiritual and materialist

worldview factors were generated and examined together with three factors of attitude: connectedness with nature, willingness to change and instrumentalism. Findings revealed that respondents of ‘intrinsically’ (inwardly) oriented worldviews, such as spirituality, tend to behave in more pro-social ways, showing a sense of personal responsibility in their environmental attitudes and generally engaging in more sustainable lifestyles. Simultaneously, the more extrinsically oriented worldviews of ‘focus on money’ and ‘secular materialism’ appear to be related to ‘instrumentalism’, and generally less sustainable lifestyles (ibid 49).

Findings in the same study also show that the correlation between behaviour and spiritual worldviews is significantly stronger and more obvious in the dietary domain (e.g. meat consumption) than in areas such as transport or energy use. In some cases, where connections between worldviews and behaviours were less evident, attitudes – working as mediators – showed stronger relevance for behaviour. For instance, while findings did not yield notable relations between the practice of cycling and spiritual worldviews, cycling was clearly relatable to connectedness with nature, which by default majorly characterised spiritual worldviews.

Eco-spirituality, as discussed above, may be nurtured and accompanied by non-cognitive properties such as emotion or compassion. Indeed, as much as a close connectivity with nature can be encouraged by rational incentives, its cultivation is hardly imaginable without strong emotional attachment and feelings. The correlation between the two has been evidenced by Antal and Drews (2015) who computerised educational textbooks (from 1800 to 2008) and scientific publications (1993-2012), and found that a loss in connectivity with nature concurs with a loss of emotional expressions towards the same. Widespread demonstration of compassion across eco-spiritual communities also demonstrates the existence of an inherently non-cognitive

factor, as the word *compassion* itself has connotations of feelings, empathy, sensitivity and heart. Thus, although spirituality is not identical with the attributes of feelings and emotions, for the purposes of this study these related attributes merge into a meta-concept which posits eco-spiritual agency as imbued with non-cognitive motivation and practice.

To accentuate emotional factors in social research is not novel. Political science, behavioural psychology, organisation studies and other disciplines have all begun to emphasize the role of feelings and emotions in social phenomena (Howart, 2013). In such works, the importance of non-cognitive agency is stressed over theories of rational choice. Recent findings of biological brain science (Damasio, 1995; 2000; 2003) also underline the inevitable role of feelings in personal choice-making. However, more often than not, Sustainability Transitions frameworks place their focus on market trends or innovative technologies while significant social aspects may remain unaddressed (Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2008). Furthermore, the theme of identities in transition (e.g. conversion from consumerist to eco-spiritual, which may often be driven emotionally) is largely if not altogether dismissed, because it is outside its scope of interest (Geels, 2011). The present research is a contribution to this body of literature, as well as theories of social practice, in that it raises questions about the motivational attributes of eco-spiritual agency manifested in pro-environmental practices and change. Investigating eco-spiritual conversion and the resulting beliefs (as motivators) and practices may provide insights about the nature of change in communities uplifting intrinsic values over materialistic growth.

Today the topic of spirituality occupies an increasing presence and research interest in the social sciences. Studies often address spirituality by commending the virtuous attributes alluded to it, such as love, compassion, simplicity, happiness, creativity,

justice, intuition, rituals, meditation and so forth. Some of these attributes are foregrounded as moral pre-requisites for a paradigm shift toward – for example – a sustainable business ethics, or a sustainable future in general. In contrast, my interest is not in rendering prescribed value to these allegedly spiritual traits, but in empirically understanding the practices of those who embrace them due to an explicit spiritual commitment. Likewise, it is not the philosophies and their moral or universal veracity I am primarily interested in, but the practices emanating from these teachings. There is empirically very little said about the lived experience of spiritual adherents and communities from an ecological perspective. This research has been conducted to counter-balance this lack by taking a practice-centred approach to the topic of eco-spirituality and explore it in a specific empirical context. In the following section I outline the aims of this work and its main theoretical aspects.

Research Aims and Questions

So far, I have discussed the problem of a growing meat consumption and placed the concepts of eco-spiritual agency and communities in focus of this research. In the context of a scientifically urged dietary transition (IPCC, 2016), and at a time when community-based social innovations are deemed exceedingly important (Haxeltine et al., 2013), it is crucial to investigate what, how and why eco-spiritual communities do to make everyday life more sustainable.

The nature of data collected and the character of Krishna lifestyle steered this thesis to frame findings from a theoretical perspective which claims that demand-side, voluntary simplicity is a pre-condition for systemic change and Sustainability Transitions. Although not in agreement in every aspect, representatives of this tenet (e.g. new

economics, de-growth, prosperity without growth, deep sustainability) unanimously hold that first: the current social and economic structures encourage consumerism and put the individual in conflict with sustainable lifestyle choices; and second: to precede a system-wide sustainability transition, a shift is necessary to embrace and protect intrinsic values such as belonging and affiliation over materialistic ones and consumerism (e.g. Jackson, 2009: 149). These points differ from a general Sustainability Transitions understanding which utilises economic growth and posits that clean-tech business and innovation will initiate disruptive changes in the system while the nature of human consumption and accumulation may keep the status quo. In contrast, a post-growth economics questions technology's capability to adequately address issues of (un)sustainability if crucial societal ills are not mended before. Jackson (2009: 87-102) claims that the current economic system based on unlimited growth, coupled with consumerism, is responsible for society's unsustainable state. As stated earlier, he puts forward simplification as a remedy for an unsustainable social and economic system (ibid. 101, 148). On a similar note, a vocabulary for a de-growth or new economics era is being developed by authors who frame sustainability through values of belonging, happiness, wellbeing, service, conviviality, simplicity, frugality and sharing (Seyfang, 2009; D'Alisa, Demaria and Kallis, 2014: 43; Ikerd, 2016a). While these values are not prerogative to spiritual communities alone, the Hare Krishna movement offers a case where they can be studied from a spiritual perspective. This approach contributes to the Sustainability Transitions literature in that it examines transitions from a vantage point that would not normally be visited by its scholars whose primary interest centres on technology, market, and infrastructural regimes of provision (transport, energy, water). Instead of embracing an ethos of economic

growth, development in this thesis is framed by a notion of ‘cutting back’ as it is put forward by Sivarama Swami in the opening epigraph.

The central objective of this work is to explore how eco-spirituality is manifested through food practices in Hare Krishna farm communities. I selected three different Krishna farms to get a broad representation of these practices as they are performed in a variety of spatial and temporal arrangements. My inquiry is led by the questions of what kind of food practices do believers follow in everyday life, what motivates them to do so, and – to address broader societal issues – what is the environmental impact of these practices? As worldview has been shown as an important factor for pro-environmental behaviour, my attention is drawn to processes of conversion among Krishna devotees. As mentioned before, identities in transition is not conceptualised in Sustainability Transitions frameworks, yet it is important to learn how people of different ideologies, worldviews or beliefs regard or disregard calls for more sustainable practices. Hare Krishna members in the west often join the movement through identifying with an alternative set of views and practices which challenge the dominant norms of society (Zeller, 2010: 73-88). Studying this transformation becomes especially important as it results in a set of practices which may carry enabling or disabling factors for wider diffusion.

Beyond identifying patterns of conversion and food practices by observing and interviewing community members, I also raise questions about the organisation of the Krishna movement owning a united network of seventy-five eco-farms. Studies suggest that intentional eco-communities often fail and collapse before realising their goal, due to lack of resources, capable management, necessary connections, and most of all – conflict (e.g. Christian, 2003: 2-13). I have earlier quoted Jackson (2009: 151) to claim that secular communities are “less resistant to the incursions of consumerism”.

Consequently, studying the characteristics of eco-spiritual communities may reveal useful insights for analysing the lifespan of different eco-initiatives. If eco-spiritual communities prove more successful, their everyday practices offer themselves to be scrutinised by theorists of social practice and Sustainability Transitions. By implication, I ask and observe Hare Krishna community members to learn what holds their eco-farms together and makes them socially and financially feasible.

While communities already provide a central subject for Sustainability Transitions, the theme of spirituality (and eco-spirituality in particular) has been largely neglected in the literature. I address this gap in detail in Chapter 2, for now only to advance the thought as a point of departure. To stress again, Sustainability Transitions research generally turns to technological or market innovations to understand and analyse system-wide transitions. By shifting the focus of this approach, I investigate the motivational and spiritual elements of food-related practices to learn how these elements relate to the switch to and maintenance of Hare Krishna diet and lifestyle. Intentional eco-communities tend to be diet-conscious, as the connection between food production, food consumption and ecology is widely acknowledged in these circles (e.g. Transition Towns movement: Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2008). Organic farming, for example, links to attitudes that favour less-meat practices (Kearney, 2010). My inquiry is whether spiritual communities, through spiritual conversion, pro-environmental practices and a close spiritual and social bond may offer additional grips to instigate dietary change inside and outside community ranks. I am interested in learning how Hare Krishna communities – as ‘experimental niches’ – maintain their vegetarian dietary practices. For Sustainability Transitions theories, this is particularly interesting because niche achievements can be related to wider systemic and hierarchical transitions and contribute to modelling and theorising these transitions. Eco-

spiritualism may get manifested partly as an outcome of ecological teachings proclaimed within systems of faith, but empirical investigations – even in religious circles – reveal that reason itself may not suffice to successfully recruit sustainable practitioners (Seyfang and Hexaltine, 2008: 14; Carroll, 2004: 57). Thus, beyond what practitioners say, I am crucially interested in what, how and why they do, and how these can be linked to change at several levels of society. In short, the underlying question of this thesis is how situated eco-spirituality works as agency for dietary change and Sustainability Transitions.

I use a framework offered by theories of social practice to follow the food-related practices on the three visited eco-farms. If the social world is composed of social practices, as theories of practice suggest (Reckwitz, 2017: 114), a practice approach leads to a closer understanding of this world. Social practice methodologies may shed additional light for Sustainability Transitions concepts through their radical focus on what gets enacted on the ground. Not unlike Latour's proposal (2005: 235) to follow the actors to tease out meaning from in-situ activities, I follow the food practices of Krishna believers to the same end. My purpose is to decode the Hare Krishna diet to better understand its role within and outside the community, and in the great competition between a less-meat dietary option and dominant trends.

As a fundamental tenet, all practice theories claim that practices consist of interconnected elements. In Chapters 2 and 3 I reference these elements and point out that theorists of the field frequently downplay the significance of the symbolic and spiritual motivation for practice by claiming primacy for material determinants. In contrast, while not denying the mediatory relevance of material culture, my investigation aims at exploring the spiritual motifs behind eco-spiritual practices.

In answering the research questions by drawing on theories of social practice, the chief aim of this thesis is to contribute to the Sustainability Transitions literature. In my perception, Sustainability Transitions studies lack the subtlety of agency-related dynamics by placing predominant emphasis on technological innovations. Although a gradual extension of the Sustainability Transitions frameworks led to the inclusion of social phenomena (social movements, politics, discourse, culture), the motivational agency of beliefs/worldviews has not been considered. By a situated practice approach, instead of emphasising the material culture only or mainly, I explore the position of spiritual factors as agency and practice motivator in the Hare Krishna community. A practice approach offers another advantage in Sustainability Transitions research in that it allows for a closer scrutiny upon the subject matter, in this case eating and food-related practices. This is the second important aim of this work: scrutinising food and food practices. Contemplating on and following up details of enactment reveals crucial connections between practice and change. For Social Practice Theory, scrutinising details of a spiritually followed diet is important because it provides insights about the dynamic relationship and co-evolution of practice elements and their stabilisation.

This thesis serves to uncover, demonstrate and evaluate these details and reveal their connections to dominant dietary practices. Concerning application, the evaluation thus offered aims at the following readers: theorists of social practice and Sustainability Transitions; policy makers; interfaith researchers and community members.

To summarise, the aims and the questions of this thesis are as follows:

Aims:

1. To contribute to the Sustainability Transitions literature by considering the agency of beliefs/worldviews for Sustainability Transitions through the case of Krishna spirituality.
2. To scrutinise Krishna food and food practices to reveal connections between practice and change at several levels.

Questions:

1. How does conversion to the Krishna faith and diet take place and what can we learn from this?
2. What kind of eco-practices do Krishna believers follow in everyday life, what motivates them to do so, and what is the wider environmental impact of these practices?
3. How is eco-spirituality manifested through food practices in Hare Krishna farm communities? How does situated eco-spirituality work as agency for dietary change and Sustainability Transitions?
4. What holds Krishna eco-communities together and makes them socially and financially feasible?
5. How does Krishna diet relate to dominant dietary practices?

Thesis Structure

This thesis consists of nine chapters. In the literature review (Chapter 2) I explore the position of spirituality and worldviews in the Sustainability Transitions literature. Instead of a static understanding of structure and agency, I suggest a more dynamic approach to this important aspect of social theory and research. I propose that in specific situated contexts spirituality may have more mediatory role for transitions than

technological innovation or other agencies. Considering the multiplicity of determinants in systemic transitions, further extension of frameworks may be required to include properties like belief, worldview, ethics and spiritual motivation.

In Chapter 3 I present methodological considerations and the theoretical framework. This research is based on an itinerate design that utilises emergent themes and induction to shape and steer concepts by matching and re-matching theory with findings. In presenting the research design I give reason for the selection of the cases and discuss how some of the methods – such as photography – proved especially helpful in letting data guide further investigations.

In the five following chapters (Chapters 4-8) I present and discuss findings. First, I provide an introduction about the organisation of ISKCON: International Society of Krishna Consciousness. After thus setting the stage I present findings from the case studies (one chapter for each eco-farm) in an interpretive way. The purpose of these descriptions is to provide an overall and detailed vision about Krishna eco-spirituality and its practical manifestations. I depict aspects that are most relevant to more sustainable practices, their stabilisation, and their diffusion. I begin each chapter by introducing the farm communities from a perspective focusing on their unique and historical characteristics, and their spiritual attributes. My reflections and impressions as researcher are also outlined. I do not detail the exclusively religious aspects of Hare Krishna lifestyle such as chanting, fasts, rituals, etc., but I reference them to emphasise the spiritual motifs behind everyday practices. In each chapter I visit distinctive practices in the respective locations, and give experiential accounts by presenting my own engagement with those practices. To understand the nature of dietary change in a spiritual community, followers' narratives about embracing its messages may be

insightful. Thus, each chapter ends by outlining individual and collective examples about devotees' conversion to Hare Krishna beliefs and practices.

I analyse findings in Chapter 8 by drawing on the tenets of Social Practice Theory while occupying a vantage point offered by an economics which is not based on unlimited growth, nor on technological innovations, but on simplification and sharing. Instead of placing – by default – an overwhelming focus on the role of the material culture, I accentuate the role of non-material elements as a source of human agency for change. I explore correlations between conversion to eco-spirituality, the durability of food practices, and the longevity of ISCKON's communities. I present Hare Krishna lifestyle to offer an exemplary though not unambiguous case for the diffusion of more sustainable practices into wider society. Finally, I outline the possible outcome of the competition between dominant and less-meat dietary practices. In the Conclusions (Chapter 9) I address questions of application, limitations and potentials to carry the agenda of eco-spiritual research further.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW. SPIRITUALITY AND HUMAN AGENCY IN THE SUSTAINABILITY TRANSITIONS LITERATURE

The aim of this review is twofold. While the primary purpose is to explore and locate the place of (eco-)spirituality in the Sustainability Transitions literature, this can only be understood by first considering the ontological conception and the treatment of human agency for change by Sustainability Transitions scholars. To do that, I first provide an overview of how the concept of agency has been perceived and incrementally extended in the field in recent years. Then, in view of these developments, I investigate how eco-spirituality as a worldview is conceptualised in the corresponding framework(s). But before entering these subjects, an introductory section must briefly explain why spirituality provides empirically interesting topics for Sustainability Transitions research.

Spirituality, Ecology and Sustainability Transitions

The concept of spirituality is addressed from a great variety of perspectives across the scientific world. In focus of this present work is a spirituality which is pro-environmental, or in other words, environmentally significant (less CO₂ intensive). Various bodies of literature may also refer to it as eco-spirituality or bio-spirituality, emphasising the practical, lifestyle-related qualities represented by specific spiritualities and communities of practice that fall into the pro-environmental category. Research in the field may focus on institutional religiosity and study the life of religious organisations such as the Hare Krishna, Buddhist, or Seventh-day Adventist movements (Nath, 2010). At the same time, there is a significant movement of a non-

religious spirituality, also referred to as contemporary spirituality (Witt, 2011; 2012), which scholars claim is growing (Houtman and Mascini, 2002; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005; Houtman and Aupers, 2007).

Following Witt (2011; 2012; 2013), I discuss eco-spirituality as a pro-environmental worldview. Quoted by Witt, Boer and Boersema (2014: 41), Koltko-Rivera (2004: 5) defines worldviews as foundational assumptions “regarding the underlying nature of reality, ‘proper’ social relations or guidelines for living, or the existence or non-existence of important entities” (2004: 5). In a shorter definition: “Worldviews are sets of beliefs and assumptions that describe reality” (ibid. 3). By offering an integrative theory and comprehensive model, Koltko-Rivera (ibid.) relates worldview to “personality traits, motivation, affect, cognition, behavior, and culture”. Drawing on a variety of worldview conceptions across disciplines, the author argues that all these components are key factors in studying worldviews and their relation to social phenomena.

In their study earlier referenced in Chapter 1, Witt, Boer and Boersema (2014) categorise worldviews as intrinsically or extrinsically oriented. They find that while spiritual worldviews tend to be more intrinsically oriented (e.g. ‘inner growth’) and correlate with pro-environmental behaviours, materialistic worldviews are more extrinsically centred (e.g. ‘focus on money’) and less pro-environmental (ibid.). While further worldview categorisations are possible (e.g. modern, postmodern; religious, non-religious; human-centred, Earth-centred), the point to stress is that the ‘foundational assumptions’ and ‘beliefs’ they relate to may correspond to lifestyle practices pro and contra sustainability (see also Koltko-Rivera, 2004: 24).

An eco-spiritual worldview, I assume, is nurtured by beliefs and ethical views which lead to pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours. Yet the eco-spirituality of specific religious or spiritual groups may starkly oppose each other in terms of ecological commitment. Despite the differences, however, common in a dispersed body of literature focusing on eco-spirituality is a recognition of environmentally significant behaviours. Often captured by research in specific community settings, eco-spiritual practice is described by the following major lifestyle attributes:

1. Vegetarianism (Carroll, 2004: 95; Nath, 2010)
2. Close connectivity with nature and all other beings (Carroll, 2004: 50; Witt, 2011: 1059; Jackson, 2009: 150)
3. Simplicity and frugality (Bouckaert, Opdebeeck and Zsolnai, 2008; Jackson, 2009: 151)
4. Sharing and serving (of property, finances, land, food, etc.) (Carroll, 2004: 54)
5. Creativity and meaningful manual labour (Carroll, 2004: 63, 101, 110, 150)

While these practices are not exclusive to spiritual eco-communities, they are manifested differently in their midst in that the spiritual beliefs and teachings serve as additional lifestyle motivators for sustainability (Wenell, 2016: 34), an argument that alone provides significant reasons for explaining the potential role of eco-spiritual groups in Sustainability Transitions.

In what comes next, I use examples from social scientific scholars to briefly illustrate how these lifestyle attitudes are manifested by eco-spirituality through a central concept of interconnectedness in nature. The purpose here is not to homogenise a broad range of philosophies and blur their distinct features, but rather, to identify some

commonalities that make spirituality a significant subject for Sustainability Transitions research. Apart from non-religious spirituality, a wide array of eco-spiritualities is foregrounded in supporting literatures, representing various forms of Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, religions like the Parsee or the Baha'i, and faiths stemming from Western Christianity, including the Quakers or the Seventh-day Adventist Church (e.g. Carroll, 2004; Zsolnay, 2015; Wenell, 2016). Instead of here focusing on the differences and particularities of each of these cases, and the level of their ecological commitments, I locate some of the distinctive philosophies that appear to motivate spiritual adherents to cultivate the environmentally significant behaviours reflected in the five points listed above.

Creation Spirituality and Environmentally Significant Behaviours

First and foremost, in many variants of eco-spirituality there is an explicitly held view of the Earth as a space designed and created for the happiness of every living being, humans and nonhumans alike. This view is reflected in the practices of Eastern beliefs that build upon the notion of interconnectedness among all living elements of the world. Also referred to as creation spirituality (Carroll, 2004: 95), this affectionate view of nature and the Earth promotes a compassionate attitude often resulting in vegetarianism and an intimate, caring relation to nature. Based on concepts of intimacy that often go beyond general veneration and even stewardship (ibid. 50), this caring relation is echoed in practices that are salient for ecological and sustainability literatures. Obviously, the level and character of intimacy and stewardship will differ from faith to faith, and for non-God-centred views the Earth may be conceptualised differently. However, a practical compassion appears to be a common characteristic of most eco-spiritual groups. The dietary consequence of this philosophy cannot be overemphasised

at a time when food is claimed to be one of the most important factor in potential transitional trajectories, while also highly under-researched in the Sustainability Transitions literature (Markard, Raven and Truffer, 2012: 961). Yet vegetarianism is not the only fruit of eco-spiritual thinking. Eco-spirituality as lived experience is claimed to improve ecological and food literacy (Carroll 2004: 81), to create conducive environments for creative, versatile and fulfilling labour (ibid. 2004: 63, 101, 110, 150), and to encourage sharing activities and serving (ibid. 18) – to name but a few alternatives to the widely-problematized dominant value systems and behaviours of our day (e.g. materialism, instrumentalism, consumerism, capitalism, etc.).

At the same time, spirituality – and its religious forms in particular – is often critiqued for its potential tendencies for countercultural attitudes which may make it non-digestible for wider segments of society (Lasch, 1978: 4; Taylor, 1989: 508). Without touching on problems like fundamentalism (Giddens, 2002: 48-50), attributes such as self-centredness – as mentioned in Chapter 1 – may indirectly work against environmental protection. Another point of criticism lies in the perception of most if not all major religions as profoundly patriarchal in attitude and practice, leaving little room for the self-expression and participation of women in decision-making. Eastern religions provide prime targets for critics of religion (e.g. Rochford, 1982; 1985; 2007; Palmer, 2004).

Yet, in the face of these criticisms, it is still possible to outline traits of pro-environmental significance which are distinctly spiritual in character. In what follows, I turn to the tenets of deep ecology and cognate teachings to exemplify how a ‘meta-economics’ (Schumacher, 1973: 42) as an alternative option to growth-based development is viewed and brought to the fore in a variety of disciplines and spiritual discourses.

Deep Ecology and Systemic Change

A spiritually imbued connectivity with nature is reflected by the philosophical concepts of deep ecology, some of which are commonly shared by some Westernised forms of Eastern religions (e.g. Hare Krishna), the contemporary spirituality of the New Age movements, and a few minority groups and eco-communities within Christianity.

Deep ecology teaches the need for a deep consciousness concerning the self and all other natural beings. This proposed consciousness and the basic tenet that all beings in nature are connected and interconnected to form a cohort of equal beings, carry high spiritual connotations, and so does the overall character of this philosophy, even if its religiosity is not made explicit. The term deep ecology derives from the work of Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss who used the metaphor of a deep ecological tree to express by it “a tree with long and strong roots and different branches consisting of ideas from Hinduism, Confucius and Buddha on the one hand, and Aristotle, Heidegger and Spinoza on the other” (Ims, 2014: 48).

As Ims explains (ibid.), deep is opposed to shallow in this “ecosophy” (ecology + philosophy) inasmuch as in a shallow approach symptoms are seen as treatable through technological fixes and advances. In contrast, the ‘deep’ in deep ecology radically questions the anthropocentric worldview and requires a non-reductionist approach that gets to the roots of problems. A realisation of these roots, for the philosophy, is made possible through an understanding of the self. An entire transformation is needed in viewing what self means and how it can be turned into an eco-Self (ibid. 49). Besides, dominant values and socio-cultural institutions get deeply questioned inasmuch as they prove unable to treat ecological concerns. This calling into question systems of provision and infrastructure is of special interest for Sustainability Transitions literature which often claims a so-called second-order learning to be a recognisable characteristic

of successful niche formations (e.g. Seyfang, 2008: 71). Second-order learning reaches beyond conventional learning in that it problematises set values that are taken for granted in mainstream practice.

Through a new experience or a new recognition, a network of relationships (*gestalt*) is perceived which leads to “a strong sense of wide identification, an increased sense of empathy and a natural inclination to protect non-human life” (Ims, 2014: 52). This identification with the rest of nature – continues the author – results in a quality happiness that cannot originate from a thoughtless consumption of material goods (see also Jackson, 2009: 151). Instead, what is frequently advocated is a Buddhist economics representing a “Middle Way” (Ims, 2014: 52) in terms of avoiding both the extremes of self-indulgence and sensuality on the one hand, and asceticism on the other. As far as science is concerned, deep ecology stands in opposition to a “science based on detachment and the division between subject and object, between self and the other” (ibid. 53).

The tenets of deep ecology aptly exemplify how a variety of eco-spiritualities regard nature and all existent beings, and it is not the only philosophy that calls for an entire shift in worldviews. In the 1970s, Christian and Buddhist ethics were foregrounded by Schumacher (1973: 44-51) to challenge the economic system built upon the notion of continuous growth. His approach put forward in the book *Small is Beautiful; Economics as if People Mattered* (1973) may be regarded as one of the frontrunners of today’s ‘de-growth’ movements (Demaria and Kallis, 2014; Heikkurinen, 2016), ‘new economics’ (Seyfang, 2009) or ‘deep sustainability management’ (Ikerd, Gamble and Cox, 2014; Ikerd, 2016a). Though not necessarily or explicitly on spiritual grounds, these social and academic initiatives – together with Jackson’s *Prosperity Without Growth* – call into question the entire economic system presently regulating the world.

What is proposed is a radical shift from big to small, from technical to natural, from greed to need, from complicated to simple, and so forth. The dominant view of resource efficiency and management is replaced by notions of prosperity through consuming less by simplifying life, sharing, local initiatives, and more. To Schumacher, in line with the tenets of deep ecology, this proposed systemic change can only happen through a preceding shift from materialist to spiritual worldviews. In his proposal to “scrap economics and start afresh” (ibid. 62) he writes:

Since there is now increasing evidence of environmental deterioration, particularly in living nature, the entire outlook and methodology of economics is being called into question. The study of economics is too narrow and too fragmentary to lead to valid insights, unless complemented and completed by a study of meta-economics. (ibid. 42)

By meta-economics Schumacher means a social and economic system which is ‘philosophically’ and ‘religiously’ changed (ibid. 96). The representatives of deep sustainability management (e.g. Ikerd, 2016a; 2016b) occupy the same position today as Schumacher half a century ago, proposing that a spiritual turn is necessary to solve society’s problems including climate change. Not necessarily or explicitly on a spiritual basis, several other authors are critical of the idea that systemic change can occur through technological innovations and market-based solutions (e.g. Grin et al., 2010: 331; Seyfang et al., 2013: 3). Although not in resemblance with the anti-technological Luddite movement, scholars questioning economic growth as a measure for development emphasise the importance of simplifying life-style related practice rather than improving resource management on the regime level (Seyfang, 2009; Jackson, 2009; Ikerd, 2016a). They exclude the possibility of transition through incremental adjustments made to the current system. What they advocate is a completely new economics, the ‘economics of tomorrow’ (Jackson, 2016), which is not based on the unlimited growth of production and the insatiable desires of consumers. While

Sustainability Transitions scholars also tend to posit the necessity of dislodging and disrupting systems of provision, what they corporately imply is a ‘clean-tech’ infrastructure, where the regimes of provision become carbon-neutral as far as possible. This difference in viewpoint reflects disparities in ontological understanding, as ontological assumptions on agency-related concepts influence the occurrence of subject matters (e.g. energy, transport, food, lifestyle) within the Sustainability Transitions field. To understand how spirituality is presently treated in the literature, we need to examine how systemic transitions are conceptualised in terms of structure and agency in Sustainability Transitions studies. What or who are the perceived agents of Sustainability Transitions, and how has this view changed over time? – these are the questions of the following section.

Structure and Agency in the Sustainability Transitions Literature

Structure and Agency in Social Theory

Whenever social change is the centre of investigation, the question inevitably arises if change is contingent on the constraining power of circumstances or on human agents. According to Marx, humans make their own history, but they are unable to act in neglect of the structural heritage bequeathed to them through the past.

Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. (Marx, 1997a: 329)

Yet, the problem of structure and agency finds different representations in social theorising. Depending on their ontological paradigm (voluntarism or determinism), some theorists (e.g. Althusser, 1969) tend to privilege structuralist, while others (e.g. Giddens, 1984) agency-centred explanations. According to Howarth (2013: 123) who

deconstructs the development of the debate from a poststructuralist perspective, Marx did not provide a satisfactory explanation of society and change, and his dualistic theory of structure and agency does not explicate the connection between the two factors. While in some of his theorising works (e.g. the *Preface* from 1859) Marx (1997b) talks about change as the “interplay of objective systemic contradictions” (Howarth, 2013: 121), in actual analyses of events and historical conjunctures he “discloses a richer and more complex set of concepts and considerations. Here social and political change is the product of a range of social actors, groups, and key individuals, who interact in complicated circumstances” (ibid. 123). Howarth calls this contradiction an ‘unresolved ambiguity’ which led to an ambiguous inheritance for later social theorists. “On the one hand, thinkers such as Gramsci, Lukacs, and Sartre have stressed the role of praxis and action in explaining social change, whilst others have defended and developed more objective and deterministic accounts” (ibid.)

In brief, a structuralist view (e.g. Marxist dialectic) privileges the constraining power of circumstances, while an agency-centred view (e.g. rational choice theory) enables human agents to change the social order at their will. The debate involves philosophical questions about freewill, subjectivity, casual laws, and the constituents of agency (e.g. human and/or non-human factors, etc.), but for the purposes of this thesis the main problem is what practical consequences we reap for analysis by subscribing to an ontological position concerning the theme. In order to grasp the relevance of the debate for Sustainability Transitions, first we need to understand the major milestones in the post-dualistic development of the issue.

To problematise the dualistic view of structure *or* agency, the works of Giddens (1979; 1984) on the constitution of society is seminal. In Howarth’s interpretation (2013: 136), Giddens’ endeavour is to “move beyond the objectivism of simple structuralist

accounts” (e.g. Althusser’s Marxist dialectic), and the “subjectivism of simple agency-centred perspectives” (e.g. rational choice theory). Instead of separating structure and agency, Giddens provides an account of their interaction by readdressing elements of previous theoretical achievements (hermeneutics, phenomenology and practice-based approaches). The result, in brief, is a more complex understanding of structure, a so-called ‘duality of structure’, in which

structure is both enabling and constraining, and it is one of the specific tasks of social theory to study the conditions in the organisation of social systems that govern the interconnections between the two. According to this conception, the same structural characteristics participate in the subject (actor) as in the object (society). Structure forms ‘personality’ and ‘society’ simultaneously. [...] Structure is not to be considered as a barrier to action, but as essentially involved in its production.” (Giddens, 1979: 69-70)

In other words: “the structural properties of social systems are both the medium and the outcome of the practices that constitutes those systems” (ibid.) In Giddens’ explanation, as seen from the quote provided, structure exists outside as well as within agents, the latter of which is manifest in the form of the agents’ memory traces which they draw upon when they act. This is a significant step forward from previous conceptions privileging either structure or agency, but to some critics (see Howarth 2013: 137) Giddens – by weakening the structural grip as an external constrain on agents – does not account for these constraints in a satisfactory manner.

In his detailed version of structuration theory, Stones (2005: 59; 2009: 93-94) defends Giddens from these allegations, but he criticises him on grounds of his overly theoretical and ontological approach to a theme which would deserve more empirical consideration. Stone endeavours to complement Giddens’ focus on ‘ontology-in-general’ with an ‘ontology-in-situ’ which is “directed at the “ontic”, at particular social processes and events in particular times and places” (Stone, 2005: 7-8). According to Howarth (2013, 140), “shifting the focus this way means that the untapped potential of

structuration theory at the empirical and substantive levels can be mined and exploited”. This is the chief point in Howarth’s account in which he states that the problems of structure and agency cannot be

resolved in a theoretical and rational way. One dimension of the conceit residing in this theoreticist desire is that questions about social change, human agency, and the constraints impinging (and facilitating) social action can be conceptualized and answered in a determinate way without a consideration of the contextual and empirical circumstances within which they arise. (ibid. 148)

In his work Howarth connects the perceived lack of empirical consideration to another salient and related problem which is the lack of somatic, neurologic, subjective elements in understanding social change. By drawing upon theorists of diverse backgrounds Howarth (2013: 150-186) builds up an interpretation in which emotional factors like passion, enjoyment, joy, and to use Connolly’s term: ‘somatic entanglements’ (Connolly, 2002: 64) play a significant role in human action as well as social change. Drawing on philosophers such as Spinoza and Nietzsche, and the latest findings of neuroscience, Connolly challenges the ‘mechanical determinism’ of law-like explanations and the neglect of factors connected to what he calls the ‘visceral register’ (related to feelings rather than to intellect).

By taking these somatic (as opposed to rational) factors into account Howarth proposes a dynamic understanding of structure and agency where first: situated context intensively matters in evaluating the structure and agency ratio, and second: less visible qualities such as emotions play significant roles in processes of change. Following Howarth, in the rest of this review I consider eco-spirituality as a less visible agency in and for pro-environmental practice, and juxtapose it with the technological focus of Sustainability Transitions. Although both spirituality and technology are non-human attributes, it is possible to frame them as agencies (or agential factors) which enable human agents and social assemblages to act and contribute to change. In what follows

I present the conception of agency as it is represented in the Sustainability Literature, and connect this position to the problematization of the theme briefly introduced above.

Technological Agency and Sustainability Transitions

Sustainability Transitions theory is an umbrella term for theoretical frameworks of which the so-called Multi-Level Perspective (MLP) has become one of the most widely used and developed approach (Smith et al., 2010; Markard, Raven and Truffer, 2012: 956). Not all theorists who belong to the Sustainability Transitions research community, however, draw upon this framework. There are closely related frameworks which have evolved from the same origin (e.g. Strategic Niche Management); there are novel, innovative frameworks (e.g. Arenas of Development: Jorgensen, 2012); and there is Social Practice Theory which to some extent stands apart from the otherwise cohort community of Sustainability Transitions scholars. Although independent to some degree, Social Practice Theory, as it is studied and practiced under the scholarship of Elizabeth Shove (see details later), has strong relations with the literature of Sustainability Transitions. Despite radical ontological disputes, the two sometimes converge into one in that they draw upon each other's concepts which are mutually utilised by their respective theorists. Besides, their lineages often intersect and build upon the same scientific traditions.

Although the two groups follow similar notions as far as structuration theories are concerned, in what follows I address them separately to clarify important differences and make it clear how and why a practice theory approach may be more useful in specific research contexts, including this thesis.

Taken in a narrower sense (excluding Social Practice Theory), representatives of Sustainability Transitions form a united research community (STRN: Sustainability Transitions Research Network) and tend to publish their works in a specific set of journal outlets, to be named later. Basically, Sustainability Transitions frameworks have developed out of science and technology studies, evolutionary economics and structuration theory (Geels, 2011: 26; van den Bergh et al., 2011). According to leading theorist Frank Geels (2011: 30), the theory aims to bridge the social science divide between ‘materialist’ and ‘idealist’ paradigms, hence the application of the material aspects from evolutionary economics (prices, capital stocks, investments, resources, competition, market selection, struggle for survival), and the idealist aspects from science and technology studies (interpretations, visions, beliefs, networks, framing struggles, debate).

Several branches of the theory frame transitions as dominantly socio-technical co-evolutions of numerous interrelated and interdependent contributors. As a central concept, niches of innovation – initially often simply referred to as technological niches – are experimental places (of communities), inherently striving to overthrow the wider regimes of provisions. Although the multiplicity of causes is emphasised, the topic of human agency is less considered (for an early example: Smith et al., 2005), while – according to frequent critiques – the mediatory role of technological innovations receives central stage (e.g. Grin et al., 2010: 331; Seyfang et al., 2013: 3).

Sustainability Transitions theory has been criticised (and as a result also modified) from various angles, but this present review is primarily concerned with one of these criticisms: the lack of agency in the literature. Agency is widely declared to be too narrow in the literature (see responses in Geels, 2011: 29-30), and this lack may partly be traceable to the concepts of structuration theory as applied by transitions scholars.

As referenced above, Giddens (1984: 25) outlines his theory of structuration in which he argues for a shift from the dualism of structure or agency towards the duality of the two. Instead of having to be partial to one or the other, Giddens suggests that the two mutually condition each other: agents can only act within the confinement of certain societal structures, but their actions not only draw upon these structures but establish them at the same time. The work of Giddens “has been perceived as both very positive and very negative for privileging agency” (Fischer and Nevig, 2016: 1), and though the conception is explicitly embraced by Sustainability Transitions theorists (e.g. Geels, 2011: 27), it is also critiqued by some for its strong structural attachment. For example, working out a framework of agency for Sustainability Transitionss, Avelino and Rotmans (2011) argue that Giddens’ interpretation (of structural power) is

in fact narrowly defined in terms of dependency on and domination of structures. As Stewart expresses it, “in spite of Giddens’ formal commitment to possibilities of ‘making a difference’, it effectively makes power a function of the distribution of resources, subject only to actors’ capabilities to draw upon such resources effectively. [Giddens specification of power] makes socially transformative capacity substantially dependent upon ‘existing’ structures of domination (Stewart, 2001: 16) (ibid. 800)

Thus, while Giddens’ theory may have revolutionised and disrupted previous dichotomies (structure or agency), its conscious or non-conscious embracement by Sustainability Transitions scholars appears to make tenacious structural grips upon agents of change. This ontological heritage may encourage theorists to regard change as an outcome of fixated participation of incumbent structures and innovative agents, irrespective of empirical context.

In my view, there is danger of positioning structure and agency statically, thus disregarding (and not investigating) dynamic manifestations and contexts in the empirical field. This danger is explicated by Howarth (2013: 116-186) when he problematises the social scientific treatment of agency as introduced above.

Considering this, less visible agencies can easily be missed in Sustainability Transitions research if focus is centred upon a few pre-defined, major players, such as technology, market, business, innovation, and policy institutes. Following Stone's suggestion (), it is crucial to give empirical evaluation to the subject of structure and agency and consider the dynamic relation of the two as they get manifest on 'ontic' and 'in-situ' ground.

Another agency-related criticism directed against the literature is a strong technological bias. The object of Sustainability Transitions research is to gain understanding about how sustainable practices and technologies co-develop and create emerging networks that provide alternatives to unsustainable systems of provision. The aim is to capture the dynamics between multiple causes, but to do that by placing the overall focus on technological innovations. Deduced from historical system changes, Sustainability Transitions theorists assume that change primarily occur through the mediation of technological innovation and its role in the market. This perceived primacy of the technological is critiqued by numerous authors (e.g. Grin et al., 2010: 331; Seyfang et al., 2013: 3; Wittmayer et al., 2016: 10).

Indeed, there have been imbalances manifested by both research topics and agency-related choices in the literature (Markard, Raven and Truffer, 2012: 961). The agency-related imbalances were addressed in two major areas which are still changing the landscape of Sustainability Transitions research: the social and the political. In what comes next, for the purposes of this thesis, I briefly outline recent extensions to some of the social areas to illustrate the dynamics of recent theorising in the field. After this I position spirituality within these contemporary trends.

Extending Agency in the Sustainability Transitions Literature

Markard, Raven and Truffer (2012) present the history (10-15 years) of the Sustainability Transitions field as it grew out of innovation and technological studies and developed further during the subsequent years. 540 articles had been quantified in the literature, with some one-hundred new outputs annually, mainly published in the following six journals: *Energy Policy*, *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, *Technology Analysis and Strategic Management*, *Research Policy*, *Environmental Innovation and Societal Change* and the *Journal of Cleaner Production*. This quantitative review partly serves to evaluate and critique the frameworks utilised by Sustainability Transitions scholars, and to suggest routes for new methodologies that utilise complementary frameworks. Apart from identifying leading and neglected topics in the field (energy 36% and food only 3%!), questions are raised about the missing role of politics and other actors (civil society, cultural movements and everyday consumption practices). It is pointed out that clean-tech topics in energy supply and transport take the lead (in 2012). Interestingly however, this concise critique does not touch upon issues of worldviews and personal transformation, despite its importance for new social movement theories for example (Johnston et al., 1994: 10; Buechler, 2000). The topic of identities in transition is still overlooked by the Sustainability Transitions literature, though is recommended for considerations by some (e.g. Hargreaves et al., 2011: 20). In terms of eco-spiritual formations, spiritual conversions could yield interesting insights for understanding transitions, a topic which I later return to.

The agency-debate in the literature of Sustainability Transitions has lately become intense and dynamic. A recent review article (Fischer and Newig, 2016) quantified the presence of specific actors in an attempt to propose a comprehensive typology of actors

for the Multi-Level Perspective. Only a year before, Avelino and Wittmayer (2015) offered an alternative multi-actor perspective to understand transitions politics and shifting power relations, and to posit a concept of agency that underlines its cross-sectional (cutting across levels), complex and dynamic character.

Years before these recent theoretical works, several sets of criticism aiming primarily at the privileged Multi-Level Perspective served as invitations of a wider range of agents into the Sustainability Transitions frameworks. For one, questions were often raised about the usefulness of hierarchical investigations (e.g. Shove and Walker, 2007: 768; Markard, Raven and Truffer, 2012: 963). Instead, horizontal frameworks were recommended (see below) or even developed (Arenas of Development: Jorgensen, 2012). These proposals indirectly questioned the way agency was treated by scholars of Sustainability Transitions, as the complementary frameworks were offered to extend the nature of investigations to different perspectives and actors. Social Practice Theory, for instance, scrutinises everyday practices “for their own sake” (Shove, 2003a: online interview), and does so horizontally, irrespective of emphasising structures or some technological innovation. As such, Social Practice Theory’s major agent of stabilization or change is the practice itself, which – in the background – also has various social, material, cultural, symbolic, political parameters. Though in many respects (despite the fierce disputes in the literature) very similar to the Multi-Level Perspective (Geels, 2010: 507), Social Practice Theory radically differs from it in that it allows for the horizontal investigation and discovery of more minute empirical details and less obvious, often invisible factors unfolding on the ground.

Another line of criticism has directly targeted the issue of missing agency within the literature. Smith et al. (2005: 1492) find it “too descriptive and structural, leaving room for greater analysis of agency”. Genus and Coles (2008: 1441) raise similar points and

propose that Sustainability Transitions frameworks should incorporate constructivist approaches (e.g. actor-network theory) in order to “show concern for actors and alternative representations that could otherwise remain silent”. This is in accordance with Seyfang’s suggestions about the social extension of a heavily market- and technology-based framework. Others, during the development of the framework, have also perceived this lack and argued for “the potential to carve out the ‘social’ in socio-technical transitions” (e.g. Wittmayer et al., 2016: 10). New frameworks and theories were utilised and developed to conceptualise the political and social aspects of Sustainability Transitions. Simultaneous with theoretical developments, empirical works and case studies began to emerge in response to the critiques and proposals described above. The rest of this section is dedicated to examples of how scholars of Sustainability Transitions integrated a variety of transitional agencies into their approach over the years.

The Social Aspects of Sustainability Transitions

In recognition of the perceived inefficiency of resource management and provision-side improvements to combat climate change, sustainability policy-makers had no choice “but to confront lifestyle change and the question of how to influence behaviour, attitudes and values.” (Christie, 2010: xiv) However, dominant behaviour-based attempts – including nudging – to influence individuals have been deemed inadequate by a minority of theorists and scientific fields (ibid.; Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012: 140). Still, while there is a division among scholars on what constitutes good or bad practices in terms of policy intervention, there is a wide agreement to believe in the significance of grassroots community practices for social change (Avelino and Kunze,

2009; Hess, 2007; Georg, 1999; Seyfang and Smith, 2007; Smith, 2010; Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2010).

It is in this context that some Sustainability Transitions scholars turned to researching community initiatives from aspects other than technological innovations. As an early example of ‘social extension’, Seyfang and Haxeltine (2010: 2) applied the Sustainability Transitions framework to draw implications about the upscaling potentials of the Transition Towns movement. Their empirical findings, alongside other studies (Shove, 2004; Ropke, 1999; Jackson, 2007; 2009; Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2008), suggest that involvement-based options offering both psychological solutions (e.g. belonging and recognition) and immediate benefits (e.g. savings, community, pleasure) work more efficiently toward change than linear cognitive models (e.g. persuasion-based communication). This is clearly shown in research interviews conducted by Seyfang and Haxeltine (2011) in the Transition Towns Movement. Findings reveal that members of the movement think that knowledge and communication-based recruitment to sustainable practices may lead to burn-out syndromes and that ‘doom and gloom’ messages may have reverse effects (ibid. 391). On the other hand, they suggest that involvement-based activities like community gardening will do more to ‘percolate the word out’ through doing rather than “focusing on awareness-raising” (ibid. 393).

Elsewhere, Seyfang et al. (2013: 4) call for the social extension of agency in the Sustainability Transitions frameworks by the suggested application of complementary social theories such as grassroots innovation theory, Social Practice Theory and new social movement theory. They stress the importance of collective consumption-side aspects over production and provisioning in singular regimes (e.g. energy sector). The agency of (collective) identity – and related less visible factors – in decision-making is

referred to when effective modes of behaviour change are discussed. Drawing on new social movement theories, Seyfang et al. (ibid. 10) explain the ongoing crisis of modernity and capitalist societies (ibid. 10) by a set of societal factors where the environmental crisis is just one symptom of many that affect processes of identity formation [...] and social cohesion” (ibid.). Thus, instead of merely treating environmental sustainability as a solitary issue, for which Sustainability Transitions theory “may sometimes be criticised”, the authors suggest that a wider range of social factors are brought into analyses. Central in these studies is a shift in focus not only from technology to the social, but also from systems of distribution to end-user behaviour and lifestyle. In close relation with this line of research, Seyfang (2009) also explored the potentials of an emerging ‘new economics’ that provided research themes through its experimental innovations based on, in short, simplicity and sharing.

By some theorists shifting the unit of attention towards lifestyle-related, everyday details, further arguments were formulated about a potential usefulness of the incorporated or complementary use of Social Practice Theory for the Sustainability Transitions frameworks (e.g. Hargreaves et al., 2011). Despite heavy disputes between the two, they can also be conceived of as very similar theories, albeit presented in different grammar (Geels, 2010: 507). Geels argues (ibid.) that despite embracing a ‘flat ontology’ in its philosophy, scholars of Social Practice Theory still filter their findings and concepts through higher level systems of provision in their analyses, which make Social Practice Theory’s descriptive evaluation analogous to generic Sustainability Transitions perspectives. Yet there are some clear differences: while Sustainability Transitions frameworks were concerned with instigating change through upscaling of socio-technical ‘configurations that work’ (Rip and Kemp, 1998), Social Practice Theory provided opportunity for the close-up scrutiny of everyday practices,

whether they were innovative or not. Moreover, the stabilisation process of unsustainable and sustainable practices (cutting across several regimes at once) became equally important for Social Practice Theory to understand change and provide information for policy intervention. This opportunity attracted researchers who were interested in evaluating change and stabilisation through the constellation of practices that produce them rather than through some major innovatory breakthrough. Thus, debates revolving around Social Practice Theory, and its application in research, contributed to the expansion of the transitions frameworks at a time when the importance of lifestyle-related practices became intensively emphasised.

Through the aggregate achievements of the social extensions referenced above, it is made possible to ask a broader range of questions about how practices are maintained in specific localities and social contexts. Instead of strictly and solely monitoring scaling-up potentials through technological innovations, transitional insights can now be gained through horizontally investigating the lived experiences of those involved. This shift has significant consequences for policy intervention as it has been repeatedly acknowledged that without realising change on the demand-side level of households (habits and practices), goals for emissions reductions cannot possibly be met (e.g. Christie, 2010: xvi).

In sum, this section aimed at providing a brief insight into the development of agency and its ‘socially’ related extensions in the Sustainability Transitions literature. From a heavily technology dependent framework, transitions theorists have gradually expanded their social interest towards the inclusion of less visible agents into their analyses. The theoretical and empirical examples served to demonstrate how a diversity of agents play their part in the transitioning arena. Interestingly however, despite ongoing processes of additions and modifications, questions of beliefs and worldview

have – apart from a few case studies – hardly been addressed. In the following section I demonstrate how spirituality has been treated so far, and argue for more space for it in the Sustainability Transitions literature.

Spirituality in the Sustainability Transitions Literature

As environmental issues put increasing pressure on governments to extend the dominant focus on systems of provision towards issues of household consumption, intervention to change behaviour has in the last two decades become a major part of the policy agenda in some of the richer parts of the world (e.g. the UK: Peters, Fudge and Jackson, 2010: xvi). Notwithstanding, there are ongoing debates about what effective intervention means and if targeting behaviour is an adequate method at all. To some, policy efforts based on individual behaviour have proven to be altogether worthless and superfluous (Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012: 140), while others, occupying a less radical position, argue for some feasibility of evidence-based cognitive targeting and techniques (e.g. ‘feedback’) in changing behaviour (Peters, Fudge and Jackson, 2010). Social practice theorists claim that if real change is to be realised, it is the constellations of practices and not individuals that need to be targeted. There are also those (e.g. deep ecology, deep sustainability, or Schumacher’s meta-economics) who approach sustainability from a moral standpoint and consider changes in worldview a necessary pre-condition for any systemic transition to occur. Others may argue for the same but based purely on an economics they deem unsustainable to its very foundations (new economics; de-growth; steady state economics: e.g. Seyfang, 2009; Jackson, 2009). Despite the diversity of these positions, there is a unanimous agreement on the ecological value of grassroots community action across literatures.

Sustainability Transitions frameworks conceptualise communities as experimental niches to test out innovative practices which, analysed and evaluated, can provide information for policy makers and other stakeholders. Although the theme of spirituality and spiritual/religious communities is not expressly considered, initial endeavours have been made to explore connections between religious groups and environmentally significant behaviour. Often these explorations lack empirical depth as they are mostly grounded on small-scale case studies or desk-based theorising. In what follows I briefly discuss one article to demonstrate how the theme has recently entered the field of Sustainability Transitions research.

Spirituality and Waste Management (an example)

In a classic example of a Sustainability Transitions approach, Mohamed et al. (2012) examine the role of religious communities in enhancing transition experiments. This study aims at revealing insights through the comparison of four religious cases opting into solid waste management programmes in Malaysia. The scheme offered recycling options for the wider community at worship centres. In their awareness of the complexity and uncertainties of transitional processes, the authors set out to investigate the socio-religious layers of the programme. The study focused on why some spiritual initiatives were more successful than others. What attributes made members of one religious group achieve more results in a waste management scheme they introduced. Answers were sought through the lenses of both the spiritual manifestations of the cases and the four vantage points of the framework, which are: expectation management, networking, management and learning.

The charitable business built around the cases are considered to be one of the leading forces towards the persistence and success of the initiatives. The most successful case of the Tzu Chi Buddhist community took this charity activity one step further by integrating waste management attitudes as a spiritual expectation through a management style combining centralized and decentralized dimensions.

The practices are strengthened further through the leadership of the Tzu Chi Grand Master, who not only preaches recycling but who is also an exemplary recycling practitioner herself. “Recycling work benefits society and oneself. After participating in collecting and sorting recyclables, many volunteers realize how arduous this work can be. As a result, they discipline themselves to adopt a thrifty lifestyle and do their best to appreciate the resources that they use. Through participating in recycling, many people at Tzu Chi recycling stations even rediscover lost happiness and health. We have seen numerous examples of people who were originally afflicted with depression or drug addiction cleansing away the garbage in their minds through the act of sorting through physical garbage. They find joy and strength to start life anew and bring happiness back to their families.” (Cited in Master Cheng Yen, *ibid.* 245)

Further we read that the Master regards the recycling project as the “fertile ground for spiritual cultivation” where volunteers are likened to grassroots in the protection of their lands. It is evident in the authors' view that it was the depth of the vision and the leader's attitude towards recycling as part of spiritual growth that led to the steadfast spread of the Buddhist project at a pace and scale unknown in all other initiatives in the country. As regards networking experience, heterogeneous religious communities (age, education, profession) proved to be optimal niches where this diversity as well as an alignment through their shared belief make these networks potentially fruitful for transition experiments. All four religious recycling projects enjoyed the support of the mezzo level regime as well as foreign aid and local NGOs. Interestingly, connections to these institutions were often secured through congregation members who worked for – or in some other way were related to – these external sponsors. The religious affiliation strengthened relations outside the established routines of the spiritual bond,

which again made these niches especially effective for scaling up through networking activities.

In contrast to the popular conception of religious rigidity, findings also revealed a readiness and flexibility in improving the scheme through learning as the programmes developed. Learning not only how to advance the project technologically, but also how the programme could be adapted to the particular needs of the wider community. In concluding, the authors call for more empirical research that goes

beyond general idealism on the positive influence of religious ethics in inducing environmental practices, as emphasised in local literatures. [...] Indeed, both ethical and sociological explanations have to be combined to provide more concrete explanations on why religious ideals can be translated *into effective practices on the ground*. These sociological aspects could include their organizational and institutional structure, religious routines, leadership, membership, position in the broader community, etc. This is clearly apparent when the most successful case of the Tzu Chi Association is compared to the other cases. (ibid. 249; emphasis mine)

This article represents the comparatively few studies that aim at empirically connecting spirituality to Sustainability Transitions. Apart from this work, I could locate only two more papers that aimed at understanding transitional issues from a spiritual perspective in the areas of leadership, and resilience (Vinkhuyzen and Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen, 2014; Cherry, 2013). However, except for the waste management case, it is not within the scope of these studies to aim at empirical depth and at uncovering the lived experience of the spirituality involved. Detailed accounts of eco-spiritual practices and their transitional implications are fundamentally missing from the Sustainability Transitions literature. Indeed, this is exactly what the last quotation above calls for: to go ‘beyond general idealism’ and to include ‘sociological explanations’ for a more ‘concrete’ understanding of spiritually infused practices.

Social Practice Theory (Social Practice Theory) may provide useful insights and methodological tools to fill the gap referenced here. In order to search out what makes

practices ‘effective on the ground’, scholars of Social Practice Theory call attention to details of everyday practices that go beyond broad assumptions or generalisations (e.g. religious people are good advocates for climate) and require careful scrutiny into practice constellations (e.g. why and how the Amish community is sustained without electricity).

Although not a theorist of practice per se, Latour who strongly influenced the development of Social Practice Theory (Shove, Pantzar and Watson (2012: 10), suggests that to learn why religious people do certain things, we need to ask them (Latour, 2005: 235). Drawing upon this proposal, theorist of ethical consumption Wenell (2016) inquired into why religious adherents might have more stimuli to act ethically than others. According to the author, conventional consumer ethics are scientifically challenged globally, in some cases putting forward ethical consumption as a supra-moral alternative. The term supra-moral refers to an attitude that goes beyond the limits of what is traditionally and conventionally expected, imposed or recognised by society (Kupperman, 1999: 172). Considering Latour’s concept about ‘plug-ins’ (Latour, 2005: 209), which allow actors to make competent consumer choices, Wenell (2016, 34) suggests that supra-moral alternatives of consumption may be more readily attainable to adherents of religion. In Latour’s theory, plug-ins serve as know-how for making consumer choices (competence), and they result from prior learning or experience (e.g. if I buy this I support a small farm, or this food contains something which is not good for my health). To extend the thought, these plug-ins – among other options – can be embedded spiritual teachings/beliefs that have resonance with followers, resulting in supra-moral and pro-environmental behaviour. For instance, Hare Krishna believers will not consume animal flesh as a direct consequence of their ethical and spiritual standpoint on eating. Because of the broad versatility of

plug-ins to draw upon (e.g. teachings, beliefs, emotions, experiences), religious practitioners may become special objects of research when consumer ethics is the aim of inquiry. Wenell (ibid.) draws attention to some of these plug-in effects, one of which is the spiritual teachings of Christianity or Buddhism. The story of the good Samaritan is one such example. In that parable a Samaritan man, culturally regarded as an enemy to the Jews, helps a sick Jew lying on the roadside, thus disregarding the law of defilement (not to touch a potentially dead body). In this situated context, dominant cultural norms are overridden by spiritual conviction and motivation. This supra-moral act exemplifies how ethical consumption may overwrite dominant ways of praxis. Although not explicated by Wenell, embracing the collective spirituality of a group through conversion is key towards an understanding of how supra-moral attitudes come to existence. Conceptualising identity is an important factor in the literature of new social movements (Johnston et al., 1994). Johnston argues that new social movements rise “in defence of identity”, especially for youth alienated from the “impoverishment of interaction in modern society” (ibid. 10). Inasmuch as collective identities “have subcultural orientations that challenge the dominant system” (ibid.), the detailed investigations of how they are obtained and maintained symbolically and organizationally promise to yield significant lessons for students of Sustainability Transitions.

Another body of literature focusing on spiritual conversion claims that the new way of thinking obtained through the process is accompanied by a radical change in the converts’ conduct (Rambo, 1993: 173; Zinnbauer and Pargament, 1998: 163). In their research article investigating spiritual conversion and religious change among college students, Zinnbauer and Pargament (1998) give a brief history of nearly a hundred years of conversion research in the social sciences. According to this, research reflects either

a classic or a contemporary paradigm. The classical view or definition, drawing on the road-to-Damascus experience as a generic example, regards conversion as a sudden or gradual process where the self radically, but not necessarily purposefully, transforms “for the better”. A more contemporary view sees it as a typically gradual and self-conscious process and as such “represents a humanistic alternative to the determinism of the classic paradigm” (ibid. 162).

While some scholars tried to identify causes or motifs for conversion, others endeavoured to develop predictive models that “characterize conversion as the result of personal predisposing factors and situational determinants” (ibid). Research studies inquiring into the precipices of conversions (e.g. Starbuck, 1899; James 1961/1902) report that it often follows a stressful period, a sense of confusion or depression, which is resolved through the experience. Several theoretical discussions claim that emotional turmoil precedes sudden conversion experiences (e.g., Bragan 1977; Galanter 1982; Meadow and Kahoe 1984). However, in some cases it is neither stress nor an insatiable search that particularly conditions and precipitates the experience, which takes place with no prior indications (Zinnbauer and Pargament, 1998).

Evidently, these turns can be of different character. The relevant literature differentiates between religious and spiritual conversions, and makes mention of secular and ideological conversions, too (Meadow and Kahoe, 1984). Within the confines of spirituality, it is stated that people can be converted to a religion, a religious group, or a spiritual force such as God or God’s humanly personalised forms (e.g. Zinnbauer and Pargament 1998, 166). Apart from these cases, conversion accounts can also be found where a spiritual force cannot be named. More importantly for this thesis, conversion research has long established that spiritual conversions result in a radical change of conduct (e.g. Rambo, 1993: 173; Zinnbauer and Pargament, 1998: 163). However, little

if anything is said about the durability of change thus taking place. With change and transitions in focus, it is important to analyse the nature and the motivational factors of these conversions, and the durability of practices supported and followed by them.

From an ecological perspective, it is possible to perceive the conversion experience and its repeated narration (Rambo, 1993: 137) as an additional motivator (plug-in) for practice which is not available to non-converts. As spiritual adherents may possess more and different motivational factors for pro-environmental action, investigating these factors may lead to valuable findings for scholars of ethical consumption, sustainable practice and Sustainability Transitions.

Additionally, to complement the cognitive sphere of how spiritual followers think, and to understand the agential factors in play as they dynamically unfold on the ground, there is a deeper layer of practice research: the level of experience, where Social Practice Theory may play an important role. Social Practice Theory's basic tenet is to follow practice through uncovering the historicity and dynamics of its elements, and by this to provide accounts of the decay and stabilization of the practices in question. Following practice becomes crucial if the social world – as Social Practice Theory scholars claim – consists of practices and the bundles they form (Reckwitz 2017: 114). In the next section I briefly explain what practice elements are and how the utilisation of Social Practice Theory may enrich our understanding of human or non-human agency in and for Sustainability Transitions.

Social Practice Theory

Social Practice Theory is a twenty-first century tool for investigating social practices, and through them processes of change and stabilisation. Theories of practice

unanimously take the stance that the study of practices is to be approached in radically different ways than before the turn of century. The works of philosopher Theodore Schatzki, and particularly his book entitled *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (Schatzki and Cetina, 2000) began to generate discussions to this end, resulting in diverse theoretical perspectives. The convergence of different concepts into a universal practice theory is yet to be seen, but contours of it are evidently emerging through the works of Elizabeth Shove and fellow contributors worldwide. Theorists associated with this development increasingly address issues of climate change and sustainability in their publications. One remarkable point in their theorising concerns policy intervention. As stressed before, practice theorists position practices over individual behaviour as the ultimate target for investigating or instigating social change. However profound this basic tenet sounds, it radically challenges the perceived way governances of different geographies (e.g. the United Kingdom) may tend to generate change (Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012: 140). Targeting behaviour – claim SP theorists widely – on basis of individual choice or nudging, and through this trying to change social norms, has proven ineffective in bringing about change. A book published very recently in the field (*Social Practices, Intervention and Sustainability*) carries the subtitle: *Beyond behaviour change* (Strengers and Maller, 2015) and posits that the world is populated by practices rather than people who are participants rather than authors of their own enactments. The authors pave out non-behavioural ways of intervening in social life, and they claim that it is practices and their constellations that need to be made targets of intervention. Theories of behaviour present agents as either self-interested individuals or rule-following actors, neither of which is appropriate for a theory of social practice which decentres people from a focal position. Scholars of social practice differentiate targeting behaviour from targeting practice and they

criticise what they perceive as the three major approaches to policy intervention (ibid. 2): 1. Attempting to modify human behaviour. This type of intervention is supported by theorists of behaviour and behavioural economics. The concept of ‘nudging’ has been particularly influential in this regard (ibid.). 2. Attempting to effect change through market-based mediators such as incentives, disincentives and rational economic approaches. 3. Attempting to effect change through technological means such as innovative devices, engineering and information technology. These attempts are deemed inappropriate for a practice approach. Instead, Social Practice Theory scholars propose to investigate practices through their elements, and – apart from enabling social interactions – arrange intervention through the possible re-organisation of these elements.

According to a widely accepted model, practices consist of three basic parts. First: materials, second: rules/beliefs (also called meanings, symbols, aspirations), and third: competences (Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012). These elements coevolve by ‘traveling’ together and form new varieties of enactment in different locations. However, elements of practice can travel independently out of their original context, thus making evolution and decay of practice possible in multitudinous ways. These elements, and practices themselves, may bundle up with other elements and link to other practices which in turn may strengthen or loosen their stabilisation. This notion enables an understanding of sustainability transitions through the complexity of practice bundles and their formation through the traveling of practice elements. While traveling may enable practitioners to follow an environmental best practice irrespective of its original constellation (e.g. Buddhist diet can be followed without Buddhist spirituality), circumstances in other settings may prevent these practices to take root.

While materials and competences are straightforward categories, the element of rules/beliefs is more complex, hence the variety of names it is referenced by. In detailed explanations it appears as

mental activities, emotion and motivational knowledge into the one broad element of ‘meaning’, a term we use to represent the social and symbolic significance of participation at any one moment. This is tricky territory in that those who write about social practices are in much less agreement about how to characterize meaning, emotion and motivation. (Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012: 23)

The boundaries of this element are blurred, hence beliefs (or aspirations) is added to the category to enable clearer and more balanced explanations (ibid.). However, by calling it simply Rules or Meanings – which practice theorists often do – may steer investigations towards rationalising factors, which practice theorists decentre from focus as less significant and even insignificant for social practice. But this element may carry deep-seated motivational factors which often may not reveal themselves without deeper investigations. My purpose is to accentuate these motivational factors and inquire into practice arrangements through a close inspection of what stimulates people to action. To indicate this goal, I reference this element of practice as Rules/Beliefs.

Social Practice Theory’s insightful proposition is to take practices to form, stabilise or fade according to the actualised, yet ever ‘moving’, relation of these elements. As the constituents travel, change, shape and condition each other through their temporal and spatial manifestations, so do the practices they are parts of. However useful this approach is, Social Practice Theory’s conception of agency largely resembles what scholars of Sustainability Transitions follow, which may delimit a fuller understanding of the social practices researched. Mediation for theorists of social practice is also an outcome of a balanced duality of structural and agency-related determinants. Giddens’ (1984: 2) following statement is taken as key:

the basic domain of study of the social sciences, according to the theory of structuration, is neither the experience of the individual actor, nor the existence of any form of social totality, but social practices ordered across space and time (Quoted in Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2013: 3).

This view of the individual actor may have led theorists of social practice to postulate tenets about decentring practitioners from focus and regarding them as “mere” carriers (ibid: 8) who are recruited to practice by practice itself, rather than vice versa. Elsewhere the actors are called ‘body-minds’ (e.g. Reckwitz 2002: 256), and the dominant tendency across the field is to attribute primary agency to materials.²

Despite these facts, there is an emerging agenda to give more room for the role of human, motivational attributes of practices (this is the element of rules/beliefs) next to the upheld dominancy of materials. In countering criticisms, practice theorists have begun to claim that despite the general belief, people – and understanding people – are important for theories of social practice (Hui, Schatzki and Shove, 2017: i). By emphasising spirituality, I intend to contribute to this ongoing discourse and suggest that spirituality as worldview and as stimulus for enactment is a significant agential factor to consider in practice research. Drawing on Howarth’s account of structuration, my parallel suggestion is to allow research data to decide what ratio of structure and agency is attributable to the specificity of a given social phenomenon and practice.

By focusing research on an investigation of practice elements, theorists of social practice make a crucial move from abstract theorising towards studying what takes place on the ground. Materials, competences and rules/beliefs often manifest themselves in empirical detail. As a result, everyday life and its practices become central objects for practice research. Social Practice Theory then is interested in

² Social Practice Theory scholars heavily draw on Latour’s emphasis on material culture, though also distance themselves from his claim as a “step too far” in that to Latour materials have a capacity to literary (and not symbolically) construct social order (Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2014: 9).

uncovering enabling and disabling social factors while its focus remains on practice itself. This ‘horizontal’ approach is justified by the assumption that the social world is constitutive of practices and the bundles they form, irrespective of the societal levels on which they are performed. The close-up perspective enabled by Social Practice Theory becomes especially useful at a time when the attention of climate scientists is drawn toward the importance of demand-side changes and simplifications in lifestyle practices. Inasmuch the suggested simplicity and frugality of eco-spiritual practice (e.g. Carroll 2004: 17, 95, 101, 109) reflects the voluntary simplicity advanced by scholars of the new economics, stationary economics, de-growth, deep sustainability management and akin approaches, investigating its nature and its relation to change may lead to valuable insights for Sustainability Transitions research. Scholars of the former concepts posit the idea that simplifications, coupled with intrinsic values such as a sense of belonging and affiliation, are beneficial for the environment (e.g. Jackson, 2009: 148). However, the social and economic arrangements often discourage sustainable behaviour, a situation which is deemed incurable while humanity is system-locked into consumerism (ibid. 152).

While theorists of Sustainability Transitions acknowledge the existence of locked-in constellations that steer regimes toward inertia rather than change (Smith, Voß and Grin, 2010: 445), Social Practice Theory scholars offer a lens which focuses on these dependences from a double angle. While the system may be locked-in to unsustainable practices, it is suggested that an intersection of these points of systemic inertia and end-user practices make it doubly hard to break the chains (Hargreaves et al., 2011: 18). Studying these points from a demand-side perspective may help us better understand the nature of stability and change in terms of sustainable or unsustainable regimes as well as everyday practices. While Sustainability Transitions scholars are mainly

concerned with the mechanisms of ‘unlocking’ or ‘opening up’ of socio-technical regimes (ibid.), relatively little is said about the interconnection of these regimes with the practices that get enacted on the ground. For theorists of practice and for those who propose a new economics based on intrinsic values rather than growth, it becomes important to study and understand the locking and unlocking mechanisms in and through everyday practices (Shove, 2003b: 193). In terms of eco-spirituality, for example, the power of cultivated habits may be raised and juxtaposed with that of non-spiritual manifestations of habitual action. When theorists of social practice make sense of large phenomena through contrasting social practices via their competition, a method which I turn to in Chapter 8, the factor of practitioner habits may provide an important point to raise.

Some other Social Practice Theory concepts – *feedback* or *dominant project* for example – are also helpful in understanding and explaining how specific practices stabilise or decay. If individual or community feedback concerning a practice is negative or discouraging, it leads to the disruption and decay of practice elements (Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012: 99). Dominant projects are projects of a practitioner’s lifetime, of which people cannot cultivate more than one or two (ibid. 77). In Chapter 3 I provide additional points about Social Practice Theory’s usefulness for practice research. Later, in Chapter 8, I explain and draw on some of Social Practice Theory’s notions in analysing and evaluating findings. In concluding this review, I first provide a list of reasons for the lack of spirituality in the Sustainability Transitions literature, and close by an invitation to consider its significance for research.

Conclusions

Except for its strong technical orientation, one reason for the overlooked spirituality – and worldviews in general – may be found in the position Sustainability Transitions theorists take in the structure or agency debate. While it is made explicit that transitions frameworks are open to make crossovers to other social scientific ontologies and their related assumptions about questions of agency, it is also clear that not all ontologies will fit well (Geels, 2011: 508). As technology is assigned to take the dominant agential role for Sustainability Transitions – which are generically studied from the perspective of structural global domains such as energy, transport, agrifood, etc. – less space is dedicated to more detailed and ‘flat’, horizontal investigations (Geels, 2011: 502).

Methodology, too, may be an important point to raise. The Sustainability Transitions frameworks focusing on regimes and how niches can influence them may often be useful, but they may distract the researcher’s attention away from questioning and exploring the nuanced elements of practice. In social research it is often these less prominent attributes that need also to be considered for a holistic understanding of the social. Spirituality (and worldview in general) may appear to be a negligible factor, but in specific research contexts it may also be a major determinant, especially in areas where worldviews and environmental praxis show correlation as discussed earlier.

Another potential cause for the gap lies – somewhat surprisingly – in under-researching the topic of food, and eating in particular. Considering its obvious significance, food is clearly under-represented in the Sustainability Transitions literature. It was quantified (Markard, Raven and Truffer, 2012: 961) to be the main subject in only 3% of the journal articles (as opposed to energy: 36%). While these figures may have been changed over the past few years, they still show a disproportionate bias towards sectors

where technology is more conspicuously present. Should this imbalance find adjustments in the future, it will naturally draw spirituality to the crux of diet-related investigations, as connections between belief systems and eating practices are already established across diverse bodies of literature (e.g. Douglas, 1972; Wirzba, 2011; Witt Boer and Boersema, 2014).

In the preceding sections I have illustrated how new actors have been gradually introduced into the Sustainability Transitions frameworks. Although more and more space has been dedicated to the social, political, and cultural arena of transitions over the past few years, both the everyday and the ontological (beliefs, worldviews) aspects of stabilization and change were largely left unaddressed.

Particularly when spiritualities are manifested in pro-environmental praxis, specific questions may be raised about their nature. For instance: how does change take place in spiritual communities, how is it maintained, and for how long? How are sustainable practices held together in their midst, and what difference does spirituality make in the process? What insights can be drawn from studying spiritual conversions? How do eco-spiritual groups succeed to survive? How are they funded financially? What social benefits can be met through co-operating with them and what are the potential harms to be aware of? What are the transitional implications of studying simplicity, conviviality, sharing and related themes from an eco-spiritual perspective? As demand-side factors are becoming increasingly important for the transitional field, these questions will need to gain momentum and a much wider attention in the Sustainability Transitions literature. Besides the choice of questions, dominant methodologies may need readjustments to meet the requirements of close-up scrutinising.

Social Practice Theory may offer insights to complement Sustainability Transitions frameworks in evaluating processes of change and stabilisation. Though open to incorporate insights from its critics, Sustainability Transitions theory still appears to be ‘locked in’ within the assumption of the primacy of the technological. Its scholars seem to embrace a static view of structure and agency where technology and market have an overwhelming and fixated role in processes of change. Research from supporting fields (e.g. new economics) points to directions leading away from this concept by claiming that without considerable changes on the demand side, problems of greenhouse gas emissions now cannot be solved (e.g. Seyfang, 2009: 24; Jackson, 2009; Ikerd, 2016a). Moreover, if overall growth is not limited, “the environmental benefits of a change in consumption practices in one area can easily be counterbalanced by increased consumption in other areas” (Röpke, 1999). Consequently, frugality, simplicity and other qualities of the ‘consuming less’ notion may need to take stronger roots in Sustainability Transitions research for it to more fully represent transitions in their necessity and entirety.

Already, siding with Schumacher’s ideas, some theorists point towards directions set out by the new economics proposal, claiming that what is called for is not incremental changes but a widespread change for the economy and society alike:

By proposing that societal systems of provision be examined, redesigned and reconfigured in line with sustainable consumption goals, the New Economics proposes nothing less than a paradigm shift for the economy, or a wholesale transition in the presiding ‘regime’. This implies that rather than making incremental changes, the model entails a widespread regime change for the economy and society, altering the rules of the game and the objective of economic development. (Seyfang, 2009: 23).

Likewise, it is also claimed that issues of resource depletion are part of a greater complex of crises which reflect worldview-related cultural values such as capitalist consumerism for example (Jamieson 1998; Raskin et al., 2002; van der Leeuw, 2008;

Escobar 2009; Lakoff 2010). In accordance with this line of reasoning it would seem reasonable to consider the agency (or agential factor) of worldviews (spiritual and not) by studying the enabling and disabling potentials they represent as less visible, latent agencies for change. Beyond the implications to be obtained through detailed empirical research in eco-spiritual communities, studying their organisational survival or failure may also reveal additional insights for policy and Sustainability Transitions.

In his book Schumacher call for a ‘religious change’ (Schumacher 1973: 96), by which he proposes a new economics as if people mattered. He explicitly argues for a radical system change through what he elsewhere refers to as ‘spirituality’ in outlining his notion of meta-economics. Whether this view is received favourably or not by Sustainability Transitions scholars, eco-spirituality provides ample room for the study of Sustainability Transitions. In spiritual contexts where lifestyle practices are environmentally significant (i.e. less carbon-intensive), studying them through the lived experience of the practitioners will enrich the transitions agenda in more than one way. Not only may it help to understand how different worldviews relate to sustainable practices, but it may also uncover how and why specific beliefs and organisations support the ongoing maintenance of these practices. Considering the complexity and difficulty of intervention programmes addressing issues of climate change, it is becoming increasingly important to understand the role of eco-spiritual communities in curbing galloping emissions rates.

In sum, I have problematised the conception of structure and agency in the Sustainability Transitions literature from two aspects. First, I have pointed out that it is treated statically by privileging technology without allowing enough room to locate less visible agential factors. Second, I have shown that it is in empirical context that a

dynamic evaluation of agency for change can be made, otherwise ontology and pre-set theorising may delimit findings in the 'ontic' realm (Stones, 2005: 7-8).

Spirituality and worldviews are issues which are not adequately addressed in the Sustainability Transitions literature. A strong technological focus and a hierarchically defined, structurally positioned research perspective may have equally contributed to this trend. The gap is also attributable to the fact that food and the practice of eating, not to mention its habitual aspects, are under-researched in the literature, despite their widely-publicised significance. Eating is not devoid of deep-rooted assumptions, and its specific connection to various belief systems and spiritualities is widely established. Consequently, when transitional questions are raised on the demand-side aspects of food and diet, eco-spirituality and other worldviews will need to manifest themselves in explicit forms.

CHAPTER 3. METHODS AND FIELDWORK

I have chosen a Social Practice Theory approach to follow and explore food and food practices in Hare Krishna communities. The Hare Krishna movement is empirically interesting for Sustainability Transitions research because of ISKCON's widespread missionary work and outreach programmes over the past fifty years. The organisation maintains a global network of seventy-five eco-farms which endeavour for sustainability through 'simple living and high thinking'. This lifestyle motto is shared by all community members worldwide. Devotees offer food exhibitions and other participatory events where visitors get acquainted with the promoted practices. Apart from vegetarianism, believers cultivate pro-environmental attitudes and practices motivated by spiritual beliefs in creation, reincarnation, and the interconnectedness of every living being. The community is known for its compassionate and ethical views and practices in food production, consumption and cow protection. Additionally, the Krishna movement was chosen because of its accompanied endeavours to follow more sustainable practices in way of organic or conservation farming, alternative energy, frugality, simplicity, serving, and sharing.

As discussed in Chapter 1, one of the chief aims of this thesis is to scrutinise Krishna food and food practices to reveal connections between practice and change. In the following section I outline the methods used to accomplish this aim.

Research Design

Methodological considerations

One important aspect of a Social Practice Theory methodology is in its interest in scrutinising everyday practice and the ways it is being shaped on the ground. In the words of practice theorist Sarah Pink (2012: 12-13):

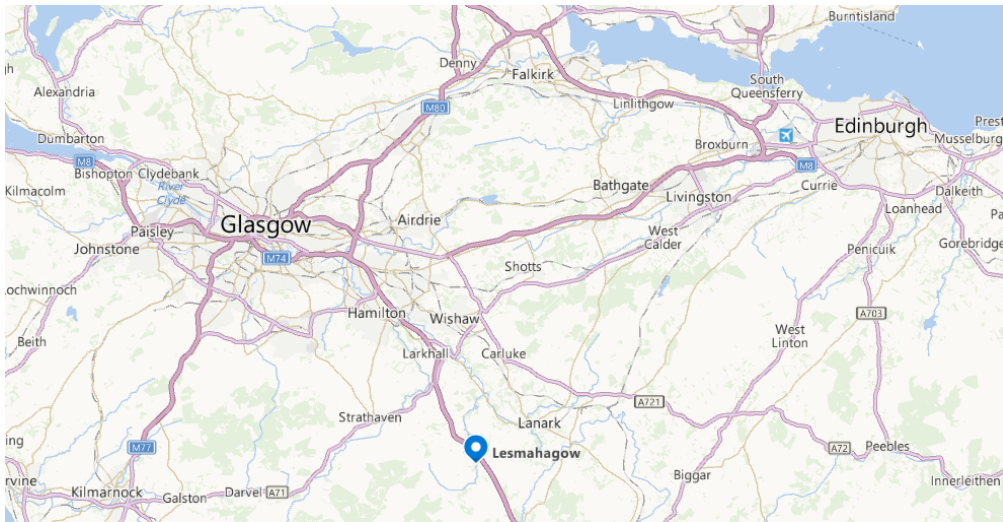
To understand everyday life as both a source of activism and change, as well as a domain where sustainability might be achieved, I argue that we need to comprehend it from within – rather than by seeking to extract data about it to analyse somewhere else, to read it as if it were text or to try to read it from texts. It is through a theory of practice and place that we can comprehend the material, social, sensory and mediated environments of which everyday life, activism and thus processes through which sustainability might be achieved, all form a part.

Apart from enabling sensory explorations, Social Practice Theory offered flexibility to focus on the vegetarian practice ‘for its own sake’ and not in light of processes of innovation (Shove, 2003a: online interview). Also, its sharp methodological stance vis-a-vis behaviourism and rationalism provided opportunities to see eco-spirituality as an outcome of spiritual beliefs and practices rather than simply rational choice. It was the non-technological, nonmarket nature of the emergent dataset that led to the choice of Social Practice Theory as a theoretical framework. Its ‘flat ontology’, which is otherwise strongly critiqued for (Geels, 2011: 37), and its insightful pragmatism in terms of empirical research methods also proved useful.

Notwithstanding, my qualitative interest in exploring spirituality led me to complement Social Practice Theory’s predominant interest in material artefacts by visiting issues of personal ideology and spiritual beliefs as expressed by community members themselves. I propose that whenever localised forms of practice are studied, it may be necessary to re-centre actors in the process of investigation.

Selection of cases

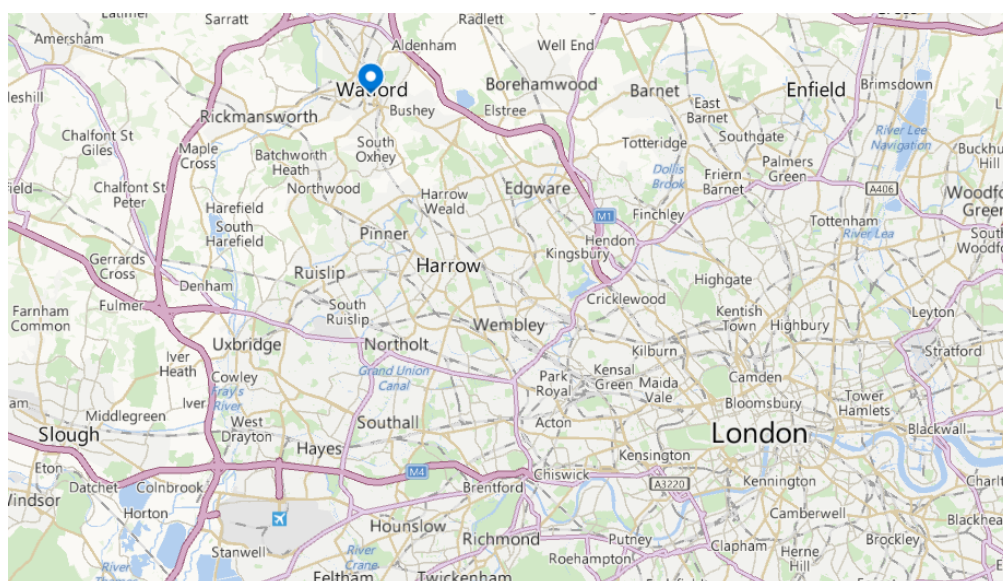
Conducting the work from the United Kingdom, I selected three eco-farms in Europe to represent different features of spirituality and ecological commitment. First, I worked four weeks (April, 2015) as a volunteer in a farm community called *Karuna Bhavan* in Lesmahagow, Scotland. *Karuna Bhavan* (Sanskrit: ‘*sanctuary of peace*’) is primarily a monastic retreat with strong spiritual and missionary endeavours. Here I learnt about the ecological views of the Krishna movement and observed the spiritual practices of the local community through participation.



Picture 1: Lesmahagow (a 1-hour journey from Edinburgh and 20 minutes from Glasgow)

Secondly, I visited another British community near Watford, London to learn more about its extensive food sharing programmes and wide social relations. I visited the Watford farm (*Bhaktivedanta Manor*) twice where I spent three weeks altogether (May 2015; April 2016). *Bhaktivedanta Manor* (the name is reference to a title awarded to ISKCON’s founder) runs an extensive food sharing programme and large-scale eco-tourism. These aspects were largely missing in *Karuna Bhavan*, partly due to its predominantly spiritual, monastic activities and lack of human resources. The Manor,

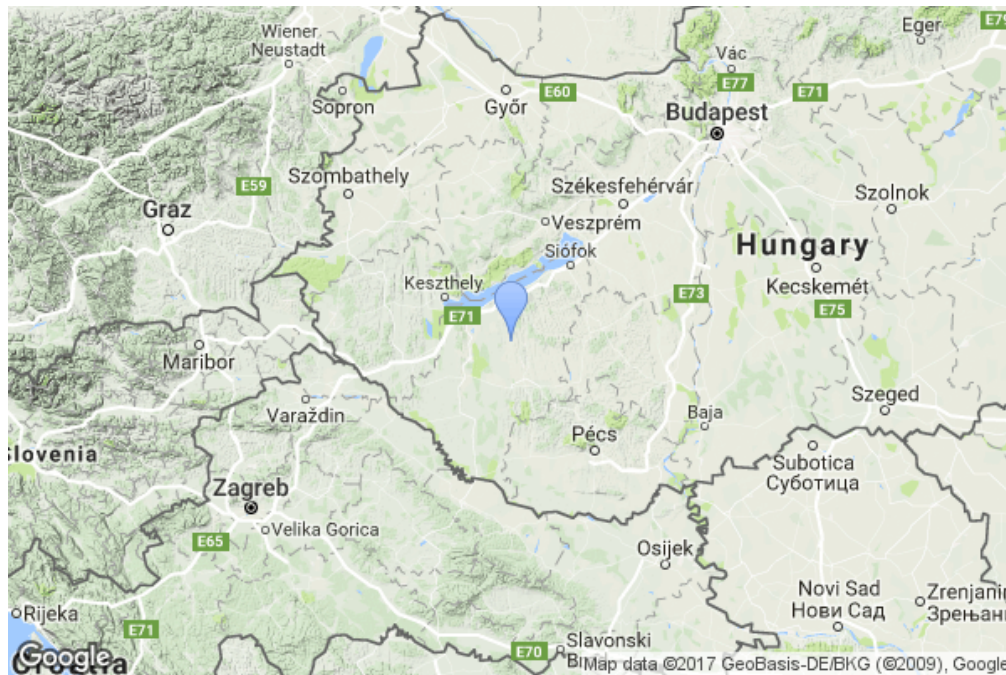
as it is usually called, has a broad social network in support of its environmental activities, including celebrities and rock musicians like Paul McCartney. A year in interval between the two visits in the Manor was helpful to reconsider questions in relation to theory and previous findings. Taking part in food preparation and a well-established food sharing programme in London fundamentally influenced the flow of the research. During the second trip, I began to focus on the extensive educational programme devotees undertook daily on the farm. Some 250,000 people visit this centre annually, a number which prompted me to raise questions of broader transitional interest. During this fieldtrip, I also spent time in the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies (established by ISKCON) where I interviewed the director who considers himself a Christian and a Hare Krishna devotee at once.



Picture 2: Watford (a one-hour journey from London)

The third community – *Hungarian Krishna Valley* or simply *Krishna Valley* – is known for maintaining an entire eco-village of about two-hundred believers. This sizable (700 acres) and renown eco-village is situated in the Hungarian countryside. My visit to the

Krishna Valley (3 weeks in May 2017) provided further details about how an entire eco-village may be maintained by principles of spirituality. As questions began to arise about the durability of the Hare Krishna farm communities and how their expansive educational programmes can be related to the broader issues of Sustainability Transitions, this third choice proved to be a necessary link to complement and complete the dataset previously obtained in the United Kingdom. Regaining biodiversity, returning to traditional ways of land cultivation, de-technologizing, and demand-side resource reductions were crucial aspects which – in conjunction with previous findings – offered a representative range of Hare Krishna practices. Each Krishna community I visited showed a distinct character, while still demonstrating and testifying to a homogeneous spirituality and practice. Other communities in Europe and other continents may also assume their own unique character, but for the purposes of this thesis – to explore and understand food practices – saturation was reached after the last visit made to the Krishna Valley.



Picture 3: The Krishna Valley in Hungary (near Lake Balaton)

In Chapters 5, 6, and 7 I give descriptive accounts of the three Hare Krishna eco-farms I visited during the last two years. The chronological ordering of my visits is in accordance with an increase in the level of ecological commitment on the farms, hence I present them in this order, gradually addressing more and more points of ecological relevance. According to farm managers, their respective communities are estimated as 20% (Karuna Bhavan), 50% (Bhaktivedanta Manor) and 80% (Krishna Valley) self-sufficient in terms of food supply (Interview 14; 18; 24: Appendix 1). Energy autonomy shows similar rates to that of food in Karuna Bhavan and the Krishna Valley (20% and 80%), but the Manor has no solutions for alternative energy except for demands reduction.

This research was designed to gain qualitative insights of spirituality through participatory investigations in community life. In terms of data collection, depth rather than breadth was aimed at. The mixed methods of involvement, participant observation and interviews were chosen as a strategy deemed most suitable to scrutinise food practices (Gummesson, 2000: 125; Bryman, 2012: 420). I outline these methods in relation to this research in the rest of the section.

Access and Research Ethics

I gained access to all three communities with relative ease. The groups in Lesmahagow and Watford recruit volunteers regularly via online channels. After my first visit to Karuna Bhavan in Lesmahagow, my new connections were helpful in gaining access to the other communities. Communication with the Karuna Bhavan community was slow, but I was welcomed as a participatory researcher from the beginning. The coordinator was one of the spiritual leaders who took an interest in my work. Apart from

the consent of my first points of contact, no additional approval for access was requested in any of the three communities.

On my first visit, although I was introduced as a researcher, I arrived in a volunteering status and had to go through all the official inductions. The group in Lesmahagow took the organisation's Child Protection Act very seriously and I had to answer detailed questions and learn the regulations of decent behaviour on site. The local group had issues of abuse in the past, and a worldwide history of the phenomenon led ISKCON to be the first religious institution to introduce an Act of this kind. Devotees referred to the procedure as a model of good practice. The other two communities offered a less formal welcoming process.

Working together with volunteers and devotees provided opportunities for extensive observations and private conversations. After experiencing this side of the research in Karuna Bhavan, I opted into less volunteering in the Manor and the Krishna Valley. As a result, I had to cater to my own needs, but I also had more freedom and time to steer the research into emerging directions.

All my visits were officially granted and arranged through the appropriate channels. I felt secure in my visiting position, though at times minor confusions arose about my status (e.g. visitor or volunteer). These I flexibly handled by explanations or giving a helping hand wherever there was a need.

All ethical requirements were processed through and in compliance with the regulations of the University of Essex (Appendix 2). Consent forms were pre-written and approved by the appropriate department. They were printed before fieldwork, and signed by interviewees. When this was not made possible, prior consent was obtained by email correspondence. Copies of the Application for Ethical Approval and the

Consent Form are found in Appendix 2. Audio recordings and transcripts were stored safely on my personal computer, although none of the interviewees required anonymity. Data that could violate human rights or be turned against one's community or social status was treated confidentially or not used at all.

Because of the sensitive nature of some findings, I returned my drafts and final version of the thesis to the communities who all appreciated the writings and suggested only minor modifications. As an ethical guideline to fieldwork, I always asked myself if an action or question was necessary and beneficial for the community and my work. It was only at one point that I had to guard my curiosity and not inquire any further about a sixty-page code of conduct that regulated the devotees' private and community life in the Hungarian Krishna Valley. I felt it could be deemed slightly intrusive and could breach my ethical commitment. On the very rare occasion when interviews led to topics such as one's sexual life and its community regulations, or the use of cow urine and manure for disinfecting the most dedicated kitchens, I directed the flow of conversation towards more comfortable subjects. In terms of past and future publications, to avoid misunderstandings and errors, I decided to send manuscript to those concerned for prior approval.

Participant Observation

I used the mixed methods of qualitative observations, participation, in-depth interviews and email interviews during a period of ten weeks spent in the communities altogether (see details later). Following a qualitative approach, and taking the role of overt participant observer, gave me the opportunity to blend into the community irrespective of membership qualifications, which in this case was religious beliefs.

Participant observation was chosen as the main method and strategy in order to get immersed “in the research setting, with the objective of sharing in peoples' lives while attempting to learn their symbolic world” (Delbridge and Kirkpatrick, 1994: 37). Spending extensive time together with participants provided opportunities for flexibility and hassle-free interactions and observations. For the qualitative researcher, this interaction (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2013: 223) is a “quest for understanding the identity of the individual, but, more importantly, it is about trying to get to the bottom of the process by which the individual constantly constructs and reconstructs his or her identity.”

The flexibility offered by observation as an open-ended and unstructured method was crucial because it gave ample time and opportunities to discover new areas of interest for research. Interviewees often referred to what they had shared with me before during work or conversations. Occasional interview and other methods might never have yielded a similar dataset. Immersion in community life through participation led to an in-depth understanding of social phenomena from an insider's viewpoint. As there may be differences between what people say and what they do, spending time together with target groups created a helpful setting to learn more about practices the way they get enacted on the ground. This provided me with opportunities to understand (and ask) members why they do what they do (Latour, 2005: 235), an important factor in exploring spiritual supra-morality perceived in the literature as supportive of more sustainable practices (Wenell, 2016: 34).

The nature of the investigation allowed to overtly reveal my position as researcher and shift roles between participant as observer and observer as participant (Bryman, 2012: 420), depending on the situation and the level of comfort I felt. For instance, I did not fully participate in religious programmes requiring a spiritual commitment which I did

not have, or where I could collect richer and deeper data through distant observation rather than participation (for example street evangelism). On the other hand, immersing in events like food shows, community gardening or outreach, provided opportunities to get to know the farms and the people better. There was no need to be covert as the target communities were aware of the cordial nature of the research, and appreciated to some extent the potential benefits of a critical outcome. The basic goal was to gain the trust of the group by a friendly approach and construct meaning together through a variety of community programmes and data collection methods.

Notwithstanding, to avoid observer effect or participant bias, the exact topic and the research question was not revealed. The only thing group members and other respondents knew of was that the research was centred on dietary topics. Thus, it was entirely dependent on them to link – if they wished – the maintenance of the meat-free diet to the spirituality they embraced and experienced. The strategy of open-ended interviewing yielded a variety of unexpected, emerging data, which contributes to the validity of the work. It gave opportunity to express grievances as well as to share what participants found important on their spiritual journey to the faith.

As the research is centred upon food, I expected to get informative data during casual conversations relating to the food cycle with members and friends visiting the target groups. Interestingly, for reasons to be later developed in this thesis, the dining table – in religious, community settings – did not offer opportunities for personal discussions. However, given its close connection to the topic of research, the dining room proved to be an effective place for a 'hanging around' approach to take valuable “notes and make analytical observations in situ” (Tyler, 2014: 3).

In other contexts, however, for example during gardening, informal conversations called my attention to topics that I would later discuss and record during the interviews. This opportunity, freely and unhurriedly available on food sharing events, or in the working units of the farms, made the chosen method of participant observation in community life an ideal approach for this work. Surveys, pre-set interview visits and other qualitative methods, in themselves, could not yield the insights derived from actual participation. For example, to experience the difficulties of daily food sharing in London helped me to better understand Krishna missionary and altruistic practices. This reassured me about the advantages of participant observation which methodically allowed me to learn through repeatedly experiencing the practices under investigations, and keep on scrutinising them ongoingly. Had I conducted an interview-based qualitative research only, without participating in the lives of the communities, I may never have discovered some delicate subtleties of Krishna food.

In Karuna Bhavan I gained relevant experiences as a volunteer worker. This gave opportunities to study the life of other volunteers who joined temporarily as visiting outsiders. These volunteers, normally called wwoofers through an online scheme that connects people with organic farms (see Glossary), were not familiar with Krishna lifestyle on arrival. Discussions with wwoofers helped me to better understand how the community was perceived by outsiders driven by their own interest to visit Hare Krishna farms.

However, participant observation may also carry some pitfalls as listed in the methods literature. It requires a great amount of tact on the part of the researcher, a need that one might or might not be comfortable with and prepared for (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2003: 227). Also, the amount and rich diversity of data may distract the observer from focusing on the research questions and the theoretical literature

informing collection and the analytical process. There is also danger of too much storytelling (ibid. 238) at the expense of theory building, not enough wisdom to handle differences, or mingling in too much. Precautions had to be taken to prevent these pitfalls and keep the research aim in focus while also maintaining a friendly and polite attitude.

The threat of observer effect did not manifest itself on the farms as community members were used to the presence of visitors. Most of them were aware of my status as researcher but they did not seem to consider me as such. I was primarily regarded as a volunteer, which was advantageous for building friendships. The purpose of mingling was not primarily to take immediate note of idiosyncratic characteristics or behavioural actions which might have embarrassed participants, but to have friendly and recurring conversations. Indeed, the time spent together in a friendly atmosphere led to a natural ‘habituation’ (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2003: 237) where participants being observed became familiar with the process of observation so that they took it for granted.

Interviews

I conducted a total of twenty-nine (twenty-six with men, three with women) interviews in the communities. The gender ratio of the interviewees reflects a cultural and religious male dominance in ISKCON, a fact which I revisit in the empirical chapters (5-7.) where I also present details of status and demography. Interviewing more women may have yielded additional insights about gender roles, for example, but the three interviews made with women have not shown stark differences from the rest of the interviews.

Interviewing is widely acknowledged in the methodology literature as an important tool for qualitative research. Qualitative interviews allow the researcher to construct meaning together with and from the point of view of the participants (Bryman and Bell, 2011: 467). Because of the specificity of the transformational narratives (of conversion and identification) recorded, I could not have obtained the rich dataset without the interviews. I found that interviewing while staying in a community was much easier than when arrangements were made from the outside, and it positively influenced the flow of conversations recorded.

I used semi-structured (open) interviews to enable participants to open up anticipated as well as unexpected themes for mutual meaning making and further investigations (Kostera, 2007: 144). The interview questions were guided and theoretically informed by concepts of change, particularly those represented by Sustainability Transitions theories and Social Practice Theory.

I prepared interview guides prior to field visits, the questions of which were designed for open-ended interviews. One set of questions was prepared for community members, while additional and slightly different questions were posed to managers and outsiders. Managers were asked about organisational structures and financial, managerial issues, social networks and goals to achieve with the community. Outsiders were asked about reasons for visiting the community, their (dietary) experiences and critical suggestions. Questions served merely to guide the conversations in a ‘non-standardised’ way to help me “follow the interviewees’ train of talk and take up the topics touched upon by him or her” (Kostera, 2007: 145). Below is the list of questions addressed to community members:

1. When and how did you first learn about the community?

2. When and why did you decide to become a member?
3. How would you describe your life at the time? What influenced your decision?
4. What is your task and daily routine in the community?
5. I understand this is an eco-farm. How would you describe your personal connection to nature and the environment?
6. As my research focuses on food, may I ask you a few questions about your diet?
- 6.1. How would you describe your diet before you became a member?
- 6.2. Was diet an important factor in your decision to become a member?
- 6.3. Did you often eat vegetarian food? Did you know how to cook vegetarian meals?
- 6.4. How does the community help you in way of food preparation? Was the CHANGE hard for you and how did it happen?
- 6.5. I understand that spirituality plays an important role in the food preparation, serving and consumption here. Do you always eat together in the community?
- 6.6. How many times do you eat and what are the spiritual aspects of your eating habits? (preparation, blessing, prayer...)
- 6.7. How can you compare this dining experience to previous times when you did not know the community?
- 6.8. What are the health and environmental aspects of your way of eating?
- 6.9. What is your opinion about gardening and organic food growing? Do you take part?
- 6.10. How has joining the Hare Krishna community altered the way you view animals?

My aim was to let participants talk freely about their lived experiences on the farm and/or about the community in terms of spirituality, diet and wider sustainability aspects (environmental protection, alternative energy, societal change). The strategy was to ask interviewees questions which are as broad as possible within the expected range of subjects. A few open-ended rather than many specific questions provided freedom for self-expression and opportunity for the emergence of unexpected data. Indeed, for example, the spontaneous and miraculous elements of the rich conversion accounts directed my attention to a literature that emphasises the radicalness of change

through spiritual conversion, which inspired me to raise further questions on this subject in relation to dietary practices.

The participatory approach made it possible to build rapport with community members and use observational notes for the first few weeks or days of my field trips. By the time the interviews took place I established a good rapport with the interviewees.

After making the Consent Form understood and signed, I started with a more general introductory question and then directed the flow of conversation according to the reply given and by touching upon other themes which in several cases emerged previously through informal conversations and situations. Interviews lasted between forty-five minutes and one hour.

In a few cases where face-to-face interviewing was not possible (e.g. sickness, or when follow-up questions were needed), I turned to asking participants via email. The main advantages of the email interviewing method (e. g. Meho, 2006; Opdenakker, 2006), are that it

- does not require travelling and high expenses
- can be conducted at the convenience of both the participants and the researcher
- can be conducted with multiple interviewees over a period of time
- respondents have more time to ponder upon what and how to answer
- respondents may talk more openly because of lack of embarrassment and other disturbances
- provides extended access to participants

On the other hand, there are some disadvantages related to this method. For example, the behavioural idiosyncrasies, 'non-verbal clues' (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008: 144) of the participants cannot be observed and recorded, and it does not provide room for either the researcher or the informant for as much reflexivity as face-to-face interviews (Riach, 2009).

The lack of respondent's opportunity for reflexivity was ameliorated by initiating informal discussions after the formal questions of the correspondence were answered. This out-of-interview position provided the opportunity for partakers to reflect in freedom upon the subject and my person as researcher. I found that at times more confidential details were shared in emails than in traditional conversations. One of the most relevant findings – concerning Krishna conviviality in eating together – was revealed through electronic communication.

Methodology literature suggests (Meho, 2006: 1293) that whenever it is possible, email interviewing should be followed by face-to-face interviews for data confirmation. However, researchers who have done so (Meho, 2006: 1291) state that no additional data were obtained from the follow-up interview. In my research, most of the respondents answering in email were also interviewed face-to-face, before or after the correspondence.

Research Diary, Field Notes, Documents and Photographs

In addition to interviewing and making observational notes, I kept a research diary in which daily experiences and emerging theoretical concepts were recorded. As described in detail in Chapter 2, Social Practice Theory distinguishes 3 main elements of social practices, of which materials, and especially the way they change and travel,

occupy a privileged stage (Shove, 2012: 37). When studied together with coevolving processes of rules and competences, materials prove to play a significant role in the way, in Social Practice Theory's words, practices recruit or colonise performers (ibid. 66-69). My research diary is filled with important notes about the material culture connected to meat-free eating in particular. The diary also proved to be an important tool, not only as a reminder of certain situations, but as an originator and trigger for emerging themes. When observing farm activities and the life of community members, I was mostly interested in the ways producing and eating food was different from what could be perceived in the outside world. The material elements of planting, growing, harvesting, selling, storing are all themes of importance, but I was even more interested in the spiritual and motivational process through which forms of competence were acquired, and for what (spiritual) reasons and how they were maintained.

These diary notes, often coupled with corresponding photographs, were used for preparing the supervisory field reports which provided the foundations for the empirical descriptions found in Chapters 5-7. These field reports, later discussed with supervisors, enabled me to finalise concepts for the thesis and prepare data for analysis (Kostera, 2007: 185).

I also collated documents about the spiritual commitment and organisational structure of the different communities. Several leaflets and handouts circulated in the communities to invite visitors to yoga courses, meditation, music events or Vedic philosophy lessons. The handouts offered outsiders freedom, consciousness, wellbeing, happiness through showing the spiritual source of a better alternative. Materials designed for the insider community advertised venues available for hire (e.g. weddings) or invited sponsors to generously support the cause. I examined these documents to learn about the types of programmes offered as well as modes of evangelising (e.g.

were the programmes offered for free? Were they centred on practice or on recruitment?). In addition to printed documents, I consulted online media in the form of community websites, forums and social media. Through using the snowball technique, I contacted the minister of records at the Amsterdam headquarters of RGB Ministry of Records for Europe (RGB: Regional Governing Body), who sent me invaluable statistical data concerning ISKCON's European departments and activities. Reading the Vedic scriptures and the commentaries written by ISKCON's founder Shrila Prabhupada is one of the most fundamental activities for Krishna believers. To familiarise myself with Hindu philosophies, including Hare Krishna cow protection, ecological views, and diet, I spent time in the libraries of the studied communities as well as in the library of the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies. Cookery books like *The Higher Taste* also provided detailed explanations about Krishna philosophy and vegetarianism.

The use of photography in qualitative research as well as practice theory approaches (e.g. Pink, 2001) can also be helpful not only as a reminder of important themes, but as a guide toward new aspects unthought of before. Photographs taken during the work were reminders of the significance of materiality and spirituality alike, and amplifiers and instigators of relevant themes that emerged during the work. During my stay on the farms I regularly took photographs of gardens and gardening, plants, community members, food and dining, landscapes, buildings and symbols of spirituality. This tool was helpful in both understanding and presenting data and my experiences. I found that some photos promptly taken with no special intention at the time, could later turn my attention to themes that were already part of my interest or just emerging later. I found photography helpful in theory-building at different phases of the actual practice of taking pictures: before, during, and after the capture. When I was purposively preparing

a picture, already a concept was maturing which I felt was wanting visual confirmation. At times, however, it was the act of photography or the resulting photograph itself that prompted new thoughts for this or potential further lines of research. One example was a picture taken in a contemplation garden at the Manor. Walking around the ornamental shrubs I photographed a wooden artefact which had one word engraved in it: COMPASSION (Picture 38: Appendix 4). I took the photo instinctually but from the moment of shooting this particular picture raised further questions and led to an additional affirmation of the significance of spirituality and eco-spiritual virtues in Hare Krishna dieting. Why compassion? What is the inspiration behind and what kind of practices may it condition? – I asked myself the questions prompted through this visual piece of work. Another occasion – in the Hungarian Krishna Valley – confirmed photography to be a very useful research tool once again. I took a snapshot of a group of visitors (Picture 50: Appendix 4) who arrived in the Krishna valley by a coach. Only weeks later did I realise that all people present in the picture were elderly females without exemption and they were all obese. This realisation led me to pose questions about the demography of eco-visitors and to juxtapose the Krishna diet, fitness and wellbeing with an increasing obesity in the outside world.

Reliability, Validity, and Generalisability

Issues of reliability and validity (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002: 53) require constant reflection on the part of the researcher. My habitation in a European geography and its Christian cultural heritage made an inevitable imprint on the work. However, a spiritual partiality was overcome by the fact that I studied a type of spirituality radically distant from my own. In reflection, due to my generally accepting attitude towards different worldviews and lifestyle practices, I did not cultivate a significant bias against the Hare

Krishna faith. In terms of vegetarianism, it would be harder to judge the level of bias I entertained. Observer bias resulting from the researcher's closeness to the subject of study was an element and potential threat to be aware of (Alvesson, 2009: 156-174). Although this research is not an auto-ethnography or 'at-home ethnography' per se (ibid.), it may bear some of its features in the background. As I follow a meat-free diet it was easier to notice good practices than ambiguities, which may have influenced data collection. To prevent the pitfall of a one-sided representation of meat consumption, I turned to non-qualitative figures and explanations about its trends and its connection to ecological issues. These numbers are universal and there is very little debate in questioning their validity, a fact which makes the level of my vegetarian bias nearly insignificant.

Returning to the participants and seeking their confirmation through informal conversations or email seemed to be a simple yet profound way to support the collection process. The use of other methods in conjunction with observation (document collations, interviews, secondary data) proved also helpful to neutralize any possible bias or observer error. Involvement in social media activities (following Facebook pages) during collection and analysis contributed to the depth and variety of data and their control. Finally, and most importantly, I returned the analyses to the target communities for evaluation and potential corrections.

As regard generalizability, the scope of this work made investigations possible in three communities only, which presently only allow for indicative generalizations. Despite all the described benefits of an Social Practice Theory approach, warnings are also given (and exactly in the context of dietary change research) about some methodological pitfalls that are involved for generalising. As the dataset will often be provided by a relatively small number of participants, Social Practice Theory (and

qualitative research in general) may manifest a tendency to generalise from a few isolated cases. To prevent this fallacy, Halkier and Jensen (2011: 113) clarify the difference between statistical generalisation and analytical generalisation. In case of the latter, in the absence of a large quantitative dataset, sample results are to be valorised by matching them against social scientific concepts. This is what I do in the Discussion (Chapter 8) by turning to Social Practice Theory as well as borrowed concepts from supporting literatures.

As already discussed, Social Practice Theory enables researchers to scrutinise practices through their suggested elements of materials, rules (meanings/beliefs/aspirations) and competences, and the co-development of these three properties. Social Practice Theory analyses the way these elements interrelate historically and in situ, and offers a range of key concepts to understand how practices link together and stabilise in local contexts as well as broader societies. Projecting local practice into wide social entities, it is also possible to make sense of large phenomena by taking the local as a starting point and evaluating the entity by a variety of secondary sources (Nicolini, 2017: 111). For example, Krishna vegetarianism reveals a number of details about spiritual motivation for diet in the community, but these details need not remain within the confines of the organisation and the visited eco-farms. Links may be made to other ethically motivated movements, and – taken together as a unified community of practice – they may be juxtaposed with mainstream dietary practices in the outside world. Despite an emphasis generally placed by Sustainability Transitions theories on innovations, Social Practice Theory exercises its tools on normality and on how dominant practices and systems of practices develop (Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012). An understanding of what can be grasped as normality helps to contextualise the unique dietary practices of the Hare Krishna community. We may obtain knowledge about details of meat consumption

through statistical reports, academic publications, or simply through visiting supermarkets and venues offering food. By turning to these sources in conjunction with the main research targets, the historical formation and development of practice entities may be described and visionary judgement made about their potential future.

Data Processing and Analysis

I prepared a light categorising system to meet the following purposes:

1. To introduce readers to the relevant details of the visited eco-farms and the lives of their inhabitants.
2. To analyse Hare Krishna practices by drawing on Social Practice Theory's selected tenets where the selection process was guided by the dataset itself as well as supporting literatures that urge the significance of demand-side resource reductions (e.g. new economics) over technological innovations. In terms of the latter, the themes were selected to reflect three main areas addressed in this thesis: Agency (of eco-spirituality), Simplicity, and Community. To achieve both the above goals, the following topical categories were listed and located manually in the transcriptions (some of the terms overlap):

1: compassion; connectivity with nature; gender; community support; gardening; organic; alternative energy; simplicity; taste; enjoyment; labour; cow protection; de-technologizing; conversion; education; service; sharing; conviviality; dairy; self-sustenance; lifestyle; health; spirituality; sustainability; compromise; love & devotion; outreach; violence; mainstream culture; compromise; meat; vegetarianism; veganism; capitalism; television; happiness; casts; offering (of food); ISKCON

2: spatial; competence; material culture; meaning (belief); durability; dominant project; feedback; community; vegetarianism; motivation; affect; shift in diet; maintenance (of practice); agency; bundles; simplicity; frugality; sharing; service; consumerism; belonging

The first set of themes (point 1) covers all major subjects that kept on recurring in the communities and became important for a descriptive illustration of the community. This categorisation simply served as a guide to find content in the database.

The second list (point 2) contains themes that gradually emerged during the research period. A combination of fieldwork findings and the study of Social Practice Theory, Sustainability Transitions and supporting concepts directed my thoughts towards the dominant points of this thesis. Only some of these points accompanied my work from the beginning of my research. Spirituality, dietary shifts and the role of communities were part of the original research question about spiritual agency and Sustainability Transitions. But most of the points only occurred later as data and theoretical readings drew attention to new subjects. Social Practice Theory offers a great variety of tools, of which I had to identify the ones that were relevant for the Krishna case and its analyses.

For example, when I first entered the research field, my focus was mostly on vegetarian practices and the spiritual stimuli to perform them. Only later, during my second and third visits did I begin to frame these practices as spatially constrained and enabled enactments. The significance of space has long been raised in organisational studies. Drawing on Lefebvre, Kostera (2014: 73-88) gives a summary of a conception of organisational space which considers the multiplicity of its aspects as opposed to a traditionally dominant view of it as an 'abstract space' (ibid. 76). These additional

aspects, such as symbols, emotions, and everyday life, allow the researchers to analyse organisations from the ‘triad’ of social, physical and mental perspectives (ibid.). Space thus becomes a mediator of embodied and experiential practices and actions, a means to consider the empirical world, and even to reflect upon the ‘research process itself’ (ibid. 76.). In this last capacity, “writing about organizational space is, too, an act of spacing the organization and equally, as in experienced organizational space, has an aesthetic dimension. Its role is not just to analyze and evaluate but to invoke rhythms, invoke images and insights.” (ibid.)

Similarly, Social Practice Theory theorists have conceptualised space from a variety of complex perspectives for research and theorising (e.g. Schatzki, 2010). The human ability to perform some practices in space and time while not others is one of the basic yet insightful arguments (Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012: 90). For example, if cycling is encouraged by governance but roads are constructed to be dominated by automobiles, spatial restrictions will prevent cyclist from performance. Likewise, spatial arrangements on the Hare Krishna eco-farms make these communities conducive locations for certain practices and not for others. These considerations become crucial when localised practice (e.g. vegetarianism) is analysed and juxtaposed with baseline competitors (meat-based diets). In other words: diet is much more than a simple question of choice or taste. Social Practice Theory concepts provided thoughtful guidelines in the process of investigations, hence they made parts in the categorisation process.

Apart from the categories offered by the chosen analytical frame, crucial to this thesis are some key terms from the vocabulary of a new economics thinking. While investigating the cases in the context of Sustainability Transitions, my attention was drawn to a body of literature which posits the need for an entire change in our current

economics before a systemic transition can take place (e.g. Jackson, 2009; Seyfang, 2009). Instead of incremental modifications, this group of scholars call for the foregrounding of intrinsic values such as belonging, self-acceptance, simplicity, sharing, and akin attributes which the current consumption and production system has failed to sustain. During fieldwork, as my interest turned to the notions of this literature, I began to notice that many of the properties described are part of the lived experiences of Krishna devotees and their communities. This discovery has become crucial for data collection and analysis as it provides opportunities to examine practices that are – by some – deemed conditional for Sustainability Transitions. It is thus that belongingness, simplicity and related topics (in List 2.) became seminal points in collecting data and evaluating findings. For example, an article by Seyfang (in Fudge and Jackson, 2010) on the sharing economy (time sharing and local money schemes) turned my attention to the sharing schemes in the communities and the local money introduced in the Hungarian Krishna Valley. These topics then were marked within the text to make content management more comfortable.

Where further categorization was required, subcategories were placed in brackets. For example: Feedback (individual); Feedback (collective). All these categories formed prominent parts of the original texts or the corresponding literature. No electronic quantifying or any other computer-aided process was designed to support storytelling. They serve to provide descriptive qualitative content to guide and support analytical arguments. While the first set of points are utilised to give emphasis to certain attributes (or the lack of them) in the studied communities, they are also relatable to the second set of points, which are purely theoretically driven (Social Practice Theory). For example, the type of connectivity with nature will impact the material culture of the dietary practice (landscaping), competence (food preparation) and rules/meaning itself

(admiration, appreciation, compassion). Also, it will have qualities concerning space. Thus, all the categories listed above serve the single purpose of providing content for a critical and practice-theory-based depiction of how the vegetarian diet, through spirituality, get stabilised in and through Hare Krishna eco-communities, and how this process can be connected to broader societal levels. A sample from an interview and its highlighted categorisation are shown in the Coding Sample (Appendix 3).

Limitations of Fieldwork and Data Collection

Academic works published on the Hare Krishna movement helped to understand and confirm that – despite stark differences in specific areas – the dietary and spiritual practices are remarkably homogeneous within ISKCON’s global organisation. As such, findings in some respect may be perceived as representative of the worldwide movement of several million followers and sympathisers (exact membership data is not available). Notwithstanding, more empirical cases need to be examined to test findings and relate them to other eco-spiritual communities, both religious and non-religious. Only these empirical studies could confirm whether – or how broadly – the propositions of this thesis are further generalizable. Another limitation derives from a lack of experiential knowledge of Indian cultures. I have never been to India, and a practical knowledge about its religions, ethical attitudes, cow protection and everyday practices would have been helpful in positioning the Hare Krishna faith. Likewise, first-hand experience in the American movement could have provided details to better understand the subtleties of Krishna lifestyle. However, these limitations are mitigated by the above stated fact that Krishna food practices – the main concern for this research – show little variations in the worldwide community of ISKCON.

Summary

Besides describing the methods used to carry out this research, this chapter sought to reflect on the theoretical aspects of the work. While embracing Social Practice Theory's overall emphasis on the salience of material culture in terms of the evolution of practices, I also claim that detailed qualitative research into the motivations of their carriers in case of (specific localised) practices may be necessary. As such, for my dietary explorations I re-centre practitioners – and their spiritual worldview – into the unit of investigation, and treat them as potentially significant agents for change, though not on the chief bases of 'rational choices'.

Another important point to stress is the ethnographic character of this work. The data collection was set to be an interactive and iterative process during which the initial questions and research objects were revisited and modified in accordance with emergent data. This required the consideration of data from an early point, taking place simultaneously with the collection process. This analytic induction (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2003: 229) presupposed the use of a research diary and field notes where data were continuously recorded and reflected upon. The field notes contained different types of data from descriptive notes to comments, questions and analytical perceptions. As a methodical consideration, this kind of collection and analytical process harmonises with qualitative theory building that prompts continuous and dynamic dialoguing between data and initial questions. Thus, while the original problem of excessive meat consumption remained, emergent data and accompanied literature refined the research aims and the theoretical framework, and narrowed it down to a

practice-centred and more intricately detailed level (although broader macro perspectives are also included).

Corresponding to the above, a qualitative, inductive research design was followed for empirical investigations on three eco-spiritual farms. I utilised the mix method of participatory observations, interviews, email correspondence and netnography to gain in-depth understanding and ‘tacit’, experiential knowledge (Kostera, 2007: 31) of how spiritual motivation contributes to the stabilisation of meat-free diets within and outwith the three communities. Accompanying these methods, the continuous use of a research diary, field notes and photography contributed to the dataset and yielded emergent concepts. I drew upon observations and publications on dominant diets to gain a better understanding of eco-spiritual vegetarianism in the broader context of dominant social practices of food and eating. I also consulted documents produced by the communities, and used social media and other online sources.

A light data coding process was guided by categories that were provided by the combinatory consideration of a topical framework and Social Practice Theory’s indicators coupled with borrowed concepts from supporting disciplines. In harmony with the purposes of Social Practice Theory, the upcoming analyses are set to demonstrate the stabilisation of practices through descriptive accounts which emphasise the diachronic and dynamic relationship between its requisite elements and other contributors. Data itself yielded the storyline which gradually has become to be an illustration of Krishna eco-spirituality manifested in everyday practices of simplicity and service, together with their pitfalls and ambiguous moments. Although this illustration is not solution-driven, it contains some suggestions for policy intervention.

Through periodic reflections, this PhD writing arrived at its final form by leaving behind what initially was a slightly solution-seeking writing style which I gradually abandoned. A data-driven and descriptive method proved more suitable to the philosophy of change embraced by the theoretical framework. The conscious overall criss-crossing between questions, data, theory and assumptions, and the resulting modifications succinctly described above, reflect the qualitative and iterative nature of this work.

CHAPTER 4. ISKCON

The International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) is a religious organisation first registered in the United States in 1966, with the purpose of disseminating the Hare Krishna faith in western countries (and beyond). ISKCON's members, inside or outside, are referred to as Hare Krishnas, Krishnas, Krishna people, devotees, or followers of the Hare Krishna movement.

ISKCON's teachings are based upon Gaudiya Vaishnavism, a Hindu sect that has its origins in a movement led by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in the sixteenth century in India. Gaudiya refers to the Gauḍa region (today Bengal/Bangladesh), while Vaishnavism means the worship of Vishnu. Its philosophical basis is primarily the scriptures of the Bhagavad Gita (origin: 500-200 BC)³ and the Bhagavata Purana (origin: 500-1000 AD)⁴. The Hare Krishna faith forms an organic part of a wider Vaishnava movement, one of the largest traditions within Hinduism (Klostermaier, 2007).

Spiritual Practices

ISKCON positions itself as a reform movement within Hinduism, providing opportunities to all members of society to become initiated Krishna followers. Though the movement still retains some forms of eastern traditions in terms of gender or caste relations, from an Indian viewpoint its achievements may be perceived as advanced

³ Fowler, J. D., 2012, *The Bhagavad Gita: A Text and Commentary for Students*, Eastbourne: Sussex Academy Press, ISBN 978-1-84519-520-5

⁴ Sheridan, D., 1986, *The Advaitic Theism of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Columbia, Mo: South Asia Books. ISBN 81-208-0179-2. Additional comments from ISKCON's academic representative: "In mainstream literary form, maybe, but the Gita and Bhagavat Purana as far as we are concerned are MUCH older: They were first spoken around 5000 years ago and were initially passed on through tradition, word of mouth and even written on palm leaves (available to probably only a few before 500 BCE)"

and even revolutionary. For instance, castes (*varnas*) are not transmitted by birth-rights but perceived differently (according to professional talent and calling), and women are invited to get initiations and take active part in ISKCON's temple services. This would be impossible in most other Hindu movements, especially in India. Still, to the western reviewer, the movement's theory and practice on these issues leave the institution vulnerable to stern criticism (see more details later). Apart from these points, one major difference between wider Hinduism and the Hare Krishna movement is the latter's intentional missionary character. ISKCON's purpose is to reach out to the masses and invite people to embrace and practice Hare Krishna spirituality.

In line with the Gaudiya tradition, the focus of the Krishna movement is the devotional worship (*bhakti*) of Krishna, who believers call the supreme God, the father and creator of all. Most popularly this worship takes the form of singing 'Hare', 'Krishna' and 'Rama', called the Hare Krishna *mantra*, or *kirtan*. Krishna followers believe that singing the mantra is a path to perfection, and even by just hearing it one gets purified. According to their official website⁵, Krishna followers practice bhakti-yoga in and outside their homes. To believers, bhakti yoga is more than just a physical exercise. It involves the study of sacred texts, chanting, breathing exercises, associating with like-minded believers, eating sanctified food (vegetarian *prasadam*), and adhering to principles of mercy, austerity and cleanliness. According to the teaching, Krishna Food is to be prepared with Love and Devotion (L&D), and whoever eats it will have that love and devotion transmitted into their lives. Together with chanting, practicing prasadam is believed to have immanent supernatural power that makes practitioners perfect in the course of time. Contrarily, when *bhoga* (non-sanctified food) is consumed, consumers (unbelievers who are called *karmis*) take curse upon themselves.

⁵ <http://www.iskcon.org/what-is-iskcon/>

Encouraging the emotional, ecstatic character of worship (particularly chanting and dancing) is one of the most significant characteristics that differentiates the Krishna movement from orthodox Hinduism (Zeller, 2010: 78). Because of its strict regulations, the movement may be likened to Christian charismatic trends and Orthodox Judaism at once, which is a unique mixture of spiritual freedom and binding religious rules.

Although self-classified as a monotheistic religion, Krishna followers worship many avatar deities deemed to be the incarnations of the supreme God. Based on the ancient text of the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna appeared on earth in the form of a cowherd prince, and gave spiritual lessons, by example, that are recorded in the manuscript. To Krishna followers, the avatar of Krishna is not just one incarnation of all, but the “most intimate name and identity of the one true God who creates and sustains the universe” (ibid. 77), the avatar and the original godhead in one person.

History

ISKCON was founded in 1966 by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, later to be called by his disciples *Srila Prabhupada*(a). At the age of 69 Srila Prabhupada travelled to New York from his native Calcutta, India, to spread ‘Krishna Consciousness’ in the English-speaking world. During the year of 2016 events were held worldwide to celebrate the journey and the succeeding establishment of the organisation in the United States (New York, 13th July 1966).

Srila Prabhupada (1896–1977) studied English, Sanskrit, philosophy and economics at the university of Calcutta (Scottish Church College) where he joined Gandhi’s independence movement. In support of the movement he wore hand-loom cloth made in India and declined to receive his university degree (Klostermaier, 2007). After

meeting his spiritual master (a personal mentor or guru each Krishna-believer is to have) in 1922, he began to assist him with his mission while engaging in literary works such as writing an English commentary on the Bhagavad Gita. Later, in 1944, he set up his own magazine called Back to Godhead. Retiring from his private pharmacy business in 1950, Prabhupada devoted his time to study, writing, publishing and book distribution.

Expansion

Soon after his arrival in New York in 1966, Srila Prabhupada began teaching about the Vaishnava tradition, and within ten years the movement was gaining worldwide recognition. “Temples, restaurants, and farm communities were established, along with the Bhaktivedanta Institute and Food for Life” (see details later).⁶ Zeller (2010: 73-88) explains the sudden spread of the faith by the presence of a disillusioned population in the United States at the time. He writes:

Though equivalent in doctrine to the Gaudiya Vaishnava sect of Hinduism, ISKCON's founder – Bhaktivedanta – innovated in the way that he introduced the religion to Americans and how he positioned it vis-à-vis the wider culture. The American Hare Krishna converts rejected what they saw as the corrupt outside world and crafted a sectarian religious world for themselves, a hybrid culture drawing from Indian as well as countercultural norms. [...] Finding the traditional churches, mainstream religious leaders, and intellectuals unreceptive to his message, the swami turned to the young men and women who mingled in the city parks and streets, the mainstays of the counterculture only at this time becoming popularly known as hippies. The counterculture positioned itself against the mainstays of American society, everything from consumer culture to the ideals of higher education, American exceptionalism, the value of work, respect for government, and of course technoscientific society.

In his extensive writings and speeches Srila Prabhupada prescribed strict lifestyle rules for his followers. He claimed that a ‘24-hour engagement’ from 4 a.m. in the morning

⁶ <http://www.harekrishna.nl/english/about/>

till late evening will inevitably keep sins away from believers.⁷ Sensual enjoyment, especially sex, is to be regulated and strictly controlled. Of this the founder often speaks in his commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita. For example:

The highest pleasure in terms of matter is sex pleasure. The whole world is moving under its spell, and a materialist cannot work at all without this motivation. But a person engaged in Kṛṣṇa consciousness can work with greater vigor without sex pleasure, which he avoids. That is the test in spiritual realization. Spiritual realization and sex pleasure go ill together. A Kṛṣṇa conscious person is not attracted to any kind of sense pleasure due to his being a liberated soul. (Bhagavad-gita As It Is (1972: 5.21))

Sankirtan, a missionary activity to sell books and raise funds (often twelve hours a day: Rochford, 1991: 171) in the streets and at busy Airports has been key to the organisation's survival. Since no attraction to this-worldly pleasures are allowed, devotees are encouraged to be 'detached' and find meaningful employment in missionary service. The book distribution activity, in the United States, turned into '*picking*' in the 1970s, when devotees (in disguise) started to sell non-religious items such as candles, candies and water filters at places like rock concerts, roadside rest areas and shopping centres. Picking, the name used by devotees, while providing support for the many ongoing building projects at the time (ibid. 183), caused distress among devotees who wanted to preach by book distribution. But, according to Rochford (1991; 2007), ISKCON placed organisational pressure on devotees and their families, and mostly so on successful women sankirtan workers.

As part of the religious services, the importance of attending to the needs of others in treating the sick and feeding the needy is widely emphasised. Based on a creationist view, respect shown to others, as well as all living beings, is upheld as a primary requirement. For a Krishna follower, every day is to be characterised by unselfish

⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_d88TwbAyY

service towards others and the deities, while personal passions and desires are to be stifled based on a philosophy of detachment. Devotee men and women call themselves *das*, *dasa* or *dasi* (servant) and are to be addressed as *prabhu* (master) or *mataji* (mother). Gurus and spiritual teachers receive reverence. Their birthdays are celebrated across their communities, and they are treated as practically divine. On certain occasions (for example offering food), prayers are addressed to one's spiritual master.

Sexuality is strictly limited and regulated even for married couples. The idea of sex serving procreation purposes only is widely advocated. On the other hand, Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita (7.11): "I am sex life which is not contrary to religious principles". But ISKCON's founder explains this verse thus: "Similarly, sex life, according to religious principles (dharma), should be for the propagation of children, not otherwise. The responsibility of parents is then to make their offspring Krsna conscious." (ibid.) Marriages are often arranged through match-making by the guru's advice (order) or the Vedic horoscope. In the 1970s, young girls at the age of thirteen were engaged or married to men in West Virginia (New Vrindaban), a fact that was not uncommon according to Rochford (2007: 233).

While still alive, Srila Prabhupada began to be worshipped by his followers, and the 'divine' prefix was attached to his name. "His writings have been translated into over 50 languages and his publishing house (the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust) became the world's largest publisher in the field of Indian religion and philosophy".⁸

As far as self-sufficiency is concerned, it was the legacy of ISKCON's founder to establish independent farming communities all over the world.⁹ He wrote:

⁸ <http://www.founderacharya.com/>

⁹ <http://www.newtalavana.org/quotes.htm>

Our farm projects are an extremely important part of our movement. We must become self-sufficient by growing our own grains and producing our own milk, then there will be no question of poverty. So develop these farm communities as far as possible. They should be developed as an ideal society depending on natural products, not industry. Industry has simply created godlessness, because they think they can manufacture everything that they need. Our Bhagavad-gita philosophy explains that men and animals must have food in order to maintain their bodies. — Letter to Rupanuga, 18 December 1974

Several of these farm communities came to life only in the 1980s and 1990s as appreciation of owning land grew together with increasing farm management skills in these years only. Prior to these dates preference was given to setting up temples in cities and urban missionary work through restaurants and canvassing.

Despite the strict norms, over the past fifty years ISKCON has grown into a worldwide organisation with global achievements reported online by international coordinator Romapada Das.¹⁰ Since 1966, ISKCON has achieved the following milestones:

- 650 ISKCON centres, temples and schools worldwide
- 520 million books and magazines published by Bhaktivedanta Book Trust and distributed by ISKCON devotees worldwide
- 3 billion free plates of sanctified vegetarian meals have been distributed worldwide
- 8 million people worship in ISKCON temples around the world, every year
- 1.2 million meals are distributed every day to needy school children in India by ISKCON's Food Relief Foundation, also known as 'Annamrita' as part of the Government's mid-day meal programme

¹⁰ A report made to commemorate 50 years of the ISKCON movement

- 340,000 patients treated by ISKCON hospitals such as Bhaktivedanta Hospital in Mira Road, the Bhaktivedanta Hospice in Vrindavan, mobile clinics, and eye camps
- 2,6 million devotees walked 260,000 kms visiting 52,000 towns and villages in 170 countries as part of the worldwide mission to bring Krishna to every town and village around the world
- 100,000 devotees around the world have taken spiritual initiation into the Gaudiya tradition
- More than 6000 Hare Krishna festivals held every year globally
- 3600 home study groups (Bhakti Vriksha groups) globally
- 110 Hare Krishna restaurants worldwide
- 65 eco-friendly farms run by ISKCON to practice ‘simple living and high thinking’¹¹

Books

During fifty years of its operation, ISKCON has spread in North America as well as other continents, including Europe, where previously communist countries have proved especially open to receive the faith (Kloistermaier, 2007). Some five-hundred temples were established in North America and Europe alone (data taken from official European records), but the mission of street canvassing was regarded as superior to all other endeavours. Not only did it secure the spread of the Krishna messages, it secured the necessary finances for organisational expansion. A unique fund-raising system was

¹¹ <http://iskconnews.org/50-years-of-iskcon-the-joy-of-devotion,5689/> (The quoted figures are supported by the detailed statistical reports made by the Ministry of Records for Europe, an institution established in 2013. Minister of Records Dharmaksetra dasa sent me this report which includes comparative data on establishments and activities.)

established in the early years, which reportedly brought steady revenues for the local temple communities. Canvassing as an outreach activity is unique to just a few new religious movements in the world, but its street version, and the distinct way it is sometimes accompanied by music and dance, is only known to be practiced by the Hare Krishnas. To date (March 2017) a documented 532 million books have been in this way distributed.¹² Some of the Hare Krishna books are specifically dedicated to the themes of vegetarianism, compassion, and ecology. It is claimed (although no official record exists) that in the United Kingdom alone over a million copies of the cookery book entitled *The Higher Taste* have been handed out.

Devotees spend entire days on the streets selling books and raising funds for the organisation. The number of books sold is carefully reported each month and entered into a points system which nominates and rewards the most diligent salespersons. This system has been followed since the early years of the movement. Big books, small books, and magazines score differently. Subscriptions to English magazines score double compared to their local alternatives. On the website managing the bookpoints system, short training videos teach the art of selling successfully.¹³ They are entitled: The four Ironclad Laws of Book Distribution; The Seven Secrets of Highly Successful Book Distributors; and so forth.

According to E. Burke Rochford, Jr., a professor of sociology who ‘had become a member’ of the Hare Krishna movement ‘as a means to better understand it’ (Rochford, 1991: 42), the development of the sankirtan work was interconnected with some turbulent currents in ISCKON. The following situation, described in one of his books (Rochford, 2007: 63), refers to the specific location and Temple community called New

¹² <http://www.wsnl.net/wsnhome.htm>

¹³ Ibid.

Vrindaban in West Virginia, USA. Single women proved to be the most successful workers in selling books and raising donations, so making marriage ties were actively discouraged. Yet when more and more devotees opted into householder lifestyles, mothers were encouraged to leave their babies to the care of others or in the *gurukula* (school) established for the purpose. (When asked by the Guru to do sankirtan, women (or men) hardly ever say no, as obedience to the spiritual master is part of the teachings of the faith.) The twelve-hour duty in the streets and at the airports – a general expectation from sankirtan workers – strained several mothers in the community. This shook the families emotionally while also preparing the way for problems of child abuse in the gurukulas. Rochford's empirically detailed study describes this by the following words:

The leadership's motivation in providing child care at New Vrindaban is suggested in a saying used in the community to refer to expectant mothers; 'Dump the load and hit the road.' And to 'hit the road' meant returning to full-time sankirtan. Even though the approach of leaders in other ISKCON communities was clearly more subtle and more humane, they were no less anxious for mothers to return to full-time sankirtan or other work on behalf of the community, for women were among the most productive sankirtan workers in the movement. Sankirtan was the foundation of ISKCON's religious world, and the movement's sannyasi elite [who reached a high level of spiritual standards] made sure that it was protected against the presumed deleterious effects associated with the expansion of marriage and family life. While initially established to educate ISKCON's children, the gurukula ultimately served the interests of ISKCON's missionary goals and the need to raise money in support of the movement's communal way of life. (Rochford, 2007, 83)

Food for Life

The Food for Life initiative is widely and anecdotally reported to have been brought about by Srila Prabhupada telling his disciples to provide food for the needy and not to let anybody go hungry within a ten-mile radius of a Krishna temple. Since 1974, Food for Life has emerged as the world's largest plant-based food relief program with

thousands of volunteers in over fifty countries providing free meals to people.¹⁴ With the growth of the initiative, Food for Life Global (FFLG) was founded in 1995. This organisation is currently based in Ljubljana, Slovenia, and is the headquarters and coordinating office for Food for Life projects worldwide. With 210 affiliates in sixty countries serving up to two million plant-based meals daily, FFLG is the world's largest food relief organization.¹⁵

According to their official website, FOOD FOR LIFE's primary mission is "to bring about peace and prosperity in the world through the liberal distribution of pure plant-based meals prepared with loving intention."¹⁶ The aim is to promote

the vedic culture of hospitality. With roots in Indian culture, the Food for Life project is a modern day revival of the ancient Vedic culture of hospitality. Since the beginning of recorded time, sharing of food has been a fundamental part of the civilized world and in India, such hospitality was based on the understanding of the equality of all beings.

Emergency relief forms a crucial part in the feeding practice of the organisation. War-torn zones, earthquakes, tsunami-hit regions, are visited to provide freshly cooked meals for the needy, along with medical care, water, clothing, and shelter.

Apart from sharing and expressing the 'Vedic hospitality', one of the main goals of the organisation is to provide sanctified food (prasadam) to nourish body and soul alike. Besides Food for Life, ISKCON has other, locally established initiatives to distribute food, such as the British charity Food for All. These institutions, together with restaurants (110 in number in 2017), free food events, and globally organised food expos, are specific means in the organisation used to spread ISKCON's theory and practice concerning food.

¹⁴ <https://ffl.org/about/history/>

¹⁵ <https://ffl.org/about/>

¹⁶ <https://ffl.org>

ISKCON Today

ISKCON is managed by the Governing Body Commission (GBC), an institution that was introduced by the founder in 1970. In order to avoid any particular man becoming the sole leader of the organisation, the commissioning body was organised to govern in groups. The GBC system is explained in detail on the official Hare Krishna website. According to this, thirty-two devotees (thirty men, two women) serve as GBC members (elected by the GBC itself), whose annual meeting “strictly follows parliamentary procedure” (all points of view are to be heard and majority of votes decides). Members of the GBC are also secretaries for one particular region within the global community. According to Prabhupada’s written instructions, the GBC is not to control but to oversee the activities of the regional ISKCON centres.

On a region-specific level, such as Europe, South America or India, RGBs (regional governing bodies) undertake the supervision of ISKCON centres and projects. Local temples are responsible for reporting to their corresponding RGBs during their annual meeting, or during the year in cases of infringements or other urgent matters.

ISKCON’s local temples and institutions are self-supporting. All expenses must be met by the local communities themselves. This is reportedly done through street canvassing (bookselling and fundraising) activities, and private donations. Each temple community pays contributions to the headquarters. These are used towards schemes such as the international Child Protection Act, an institution that is deemed to be a forerunner of its kind in the religious sector. The Act was necessitated by the controversies entering the organisation during the 1970s and 80s, when the organisation published issues of child abuse and attempts to deal with them (e.g. ISKCON Communication Journal 6, 43-69).

Another area of prominence today is the organisation's involvement in environmental causes. ISKCON's beliefs (creation, incarnation) and the related ethics in animal compassion require followers to avoid meat consumption and become conscientious stewards of land in general. There is an intense discussion within ISKCON as to whether consuming supermarket dairy is ecologically and morally acceptable even on a small scale. An increasing number of devotees opt into veganism or at least strict avoidance of factory farmed milk.¹⁷ Engagement with issues of animal compassion and rights has at times brought the religion into the spotlight of ethical conversations, e.g. the case of enforced animal slaughter in ISKCON's British centre (Pigott, 2008). Emphasising the founder's frequently repeated advice, farm communities are formed increasingly to implement the commonly shared principles of 'simple living, high thinking' and to demonstrate these to the outside world. A globally spread cow protection program represents the karmic beliefs and ahimsa principles, while practical ways of de-technologizing and re-connecting with nature are shared. Interestingly, academic literature on the movement largely lacks referencing the community from an ecological vantage point, which may be contributed to the fact that these farms were in a fledgling state during the past few decades. The organisation appears to be shifting its logic from public religiosity and direct evangelising towards environmentalism and altruism.

According to unverifiable data, the community is still growing in membership, but this is hard to check as there are no clear membership requirements within ISKCON. Hungary, where part of my fieldwork was accomplished, has discontinued several of its centres, while Watford is working on the creation of new communities (e.g. Leicester). Hungarian devotees claim that the closures are the result of a rearrangement

¹⁷ <https://iskconnews.org/european-leaders-discuss-milk-to-drink-or-not-to-drink,4137>

process, and not of membership decrease. However, looking at the demography of the farm community in that country (see details in Chapter 7), it seems clear that there is an organisational halt in terms of membership recruitment compared to the last two decades of the twentieth century. At the same time, membership entry requirements are not made easier. Often it may take several years to join, and even more when lifelong commitments are made to support (and enjoy the benefits of) eco-communities. Interestingly, this strict and orderly type of management may be among ISKCON's appealing qualities for those who are looking for principles, seriousness, and meaningful changes in life.

Criticism

Societal and academic criticisms were raised against ISKCON during the 1980s when issues of child abuse came to the fore. Challenging the recruitment process of the organisation, critics turned to theories of brain-washing, pathologizing or new religious movement in their writings. The organisation's strong commitment and bias toward Indian cultures (cuisine, clothes, music, etc.), and a perceived gender injustice have also provided issues for critical inquiry (Rochford, 1991: 115-138).

The organisation's original purpose was, as a reform movement, to open the way for bhakti yoga and spiritual privileges for all, thus disregarding social status or gender. Still, traces of Hindu classifications both regarding varnas (castes) and sex have been retained and reinforced to some extent. As regard to women as source of temptation, Srila Prabhupada added the following comment to a verse in the Bhagavad Gita (2.60):

A practical example is given by Śrī Yāmunācārya, a great saint and devotee, who says: "Since my mind has been engaged in the service of the lotus feet of Lord Kṛṣṇa, and I have been enjoying an ever new transcendental humor, whenever I

think of sex life with a woman, my face at once turns from it, and I spit at the thought."

In response to criticisms directed against ISKCON, the community engages in philosophical debates (about the role of science), runs research institutions (such as the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies) and publishes interfaith statements to encourage interreligious dialogues.¹⁸ With an increasing focus on charitable and eco-farm (lifestyle) projects, and less publicised emphasis on religiosity, the movement appears to have overcome the crises emanating from internal and external conflicts and criticisms. Taking its part in the wider environmental movement fighting against factory farming and climate change on ethical bases, it is just as possible to approach ISKCON as a new social innovation as it is often studied and referred to as a new religious movement within a Hindu frame (e.g. Rochford, 1982; 1985; 2007; Bromley and Shinn, 1988; Dein and Barlow, 2007; Schweig, 2004).

¹⁸ <http://www.iskcon.org/wp-content/documents/Interfaith-Brochure.pdf>

CHAPTER 5. KARUNA BHAVAN, LESMAHAGOW, SCOTLAND (CASE 1)

Introducing the Farm

The Hare Krishna farm in Lesmahagow, Lanark, Scotland, is situated on an eight-acre land twenty-five miles south of the city of Glasgow (Picture 1: Appendix 4). Karuna Bhavan forms direct part of the small town of Lesmahagow, which is seven miles from the town of Lanark. According to the community's Facebook page,¹⁹

Karuna Bhavan or 'Sanctuary of Peace', is a space for people from all walks of life to practice a more loving and compassionate way of living. Run by the Hare Krishna community in Scotland since 1987, it is being developed as a holistic spiritual centre, to help re-establish the sacredness of life. This is done principally by following a lifestyle based on the global organisation's motto of 'simple living, high thinking'.

In line with the above motto: there is no haste in Lesmahagow, everything and everybody appears to be peaceful and calm. The place is tranquil, situated on undulating hills where monks, devotees, volunteers and visitors follow their designated routines by walking up and down between their ashram (dormitory) and the communal places such as the dining room and the temple (Picture 14: Appendix 4).

While the days pass slowly, organic seedlings in the green houses show more and more of what they will become: green peas, tomatoes, spinach, and more. Hyacinths used as sacrificial decorations for the deities will grow into maturity both in the greenhouses and the gardens outside (Picture 11: Appendix 4). This is April, and these colourful flowers in the early spring manifest a stark contrast to the still colourless hills and fields surrounding the farm. The strong fragrance they infuse into the quiet air is one of those unobtrusively inviting attributes of Karuna Bhavan (Picture 9: Appendix 4).

¹⁹ https://www.facebook.com/pg/KarunaBhavanIskconScotland/about/?ref=page_internal

The farm is located on the edge of Lesmahagow, a quiet medieval town with monastic Celtic history and an inviting parish church in the centre. Apparently, there is not much Hare Krishna involvement and engagement with the town activities and citizens, except for practical reasons such as shopping, house rentals and occasional issues in the town council. The farm's close vicinity to Glasgow and Edinburgh is significant in that some of the major outreach programmes are held there. Public halls are rented to hold various events in the city of Edinburgh. Restaurants and Krishna Centres that operated in these cities closed down in the 1990s. The community defines its main interest in spiritual outreach rather than becoming an exhibition centre for sustainability education (Pictures 18-19: Appendix 4). Apart from regional activities, some of the mission programmes are regularly held in towns as remote as Aberdeen (160 miles).

The temporal and spatial arrangements on the farm show religion and spirituality to be the underlying drive for community life and its practices. Like in all other Krishna communities, devotees get up at early dawn and start community worship at 4 a.m. My room-mate (a sympathiser who was not yet initiated) wakes up at 1 a.m., has a cold shower, attends to some of his work, and arrives in the temple hall early day after day. Statues of deities decorating the temple as well as the yard nearby demonstrate dedication toward transcendency. Outdoor shrines give opportunity to devotees for solitary meditation and chanting. Beads – similar to Rosary – wrapped around by a glove-like cloth called the bead-bag are used to assist chanting. There are 108 beads to complete a whole circle of mantras, which takes about six to ten minutes. Devotees chant a mantra on each bead, then move to the next bead with their fingers. Some beanbags contain a string of beads to keep track of the number of rounds completed. This chanting practice is called *japa*, and it is one of the most prominent characteristics of Krishna believers. Apart from eating sanctified food, devotees perceive of the

practice of chanting as the path to perfection. To see this practiced at Karuna Bhavan did not generally disturb me, but at times it felt out of place. For example, one day I was travelling with members for outreach in Edinburgh, and one of the eight passengers in the car was doing his japa meditation loudly. He found no time to complete his rounds before, and the daily requirement had to be met. Apparently, the others were not the least bothered with the incident as it is considered normal behaviour in the community. Singing and talking were carried on, irrespective of one man chanting loudly into our ears. This well represents the fact that spirituality comes first, before all other duties of life can be attended.

Historical Overview

The Hare Krishna temple in Lesmahagow was established as a monastery in 1986 with three monks, and later grew into a farm community with a present membership of forty people, of which there are five monks, one nun, four celibate families (no sexual intercourse unless for procreation), and ten community members or associates who live in the village nearby.

In the early 1980's the community travelled in a 'mobile temple' across Scotland including some of the Scottish Islands to share messages of faith, lifestyle, and food with the citizens. Joining a global programme called 'Every Town and Village', devotees 'gave people the opportunity' to learn about Krishna philosophy and faith (Interview 10: Appendix 1). Besides thus reaching out, the method, because of its adventurous setting, is claimed to have been a good induction for novices into a lifestyle promoting early morning activities, detachment, frugality, simplicity, and no television. This method is now becoming less frequent in European countries and is being replaced

by more contemporary programmes such as eco-tourism and large-scale food-sharing, or in Karuna Bhavan's case, festivals, concerts, and yoga classes.

The idea of gardening and farming was first raised in 1989 when one of the members with previous Hare Krishna farm experience joined the community and initiated the gardening project. The project developed slowly with a one-day-a-week activity during the first ten years. Bhakti, the head gardener spent the other six days of the week selling books and raising funds for the farm's greenhouses (with installed top windows and automated heating), additional farmland, and other communities such as the Hungarian Krishna Valley. Bhakti's persistence and achievements in organic gardening received media attention in the form of a BBC radio interview, magazines and online publications (Pictures 6-8: Appendix 4). Lately (2017) a Guardian article introduced his work as a spiritually imbued practice.²⁰

Present Activities

The farm was primarily established for spiritual activities. It is still stressed that no business activities are pursued on the farm, and although the community would welcome sustainable enterprises, currently there are no members to undertake them. Non-Krishna volunteers working on the farms perceive a lack of optimal crop cultivation and horticulture as well as innovatory experiments such as permaculture or community gardening. Nevertheless, fully organic gardening has been practiced and promoted on the farm for about three decades now. Mainly through the work of one committed devotee (Bhakti), and woofers under his supervision, three large glasshouses and open-air vegetable beds provide ingredients for cooking. According to

²⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2017/jun/24/how-does-your-garden-grow-krishna-eco-farm>

volunteers' opinion, however, opportunities are not utilised optimally and there is far more potential in the land. The absence of cow-keeping is a challenge to the community which needs to rely on supermarket dairy, a practice widely opposed by the global organisation.

In accordance with the global Hare Krishna aims, the farm was recently re-positioned as an eco-farm. To minimize the carbon footprint and reduce operational costs, in 2011 the farm installed two wind turbines (11 kW, Picture 15: Appendix 4), solar panels, eco-heating systems (log gasification and air source heat pumps), rain water harvest and drinking water systems, and introduced a selective waste collection scheme on its compound. There are few cars in the entire community, most of them in very simple and aged condition, kept primarily for farm work (e.g. transport) or outreach activities (missionary van). Buildings are simply constructed, there is no extravagance in the use of technology or material equipment in their infrastructure.

Outreach activities have increasingly become open to contemporary trends and demands for events such as art festivals, wool spinning, open-air entertainments, music and food programmes. Some of these activities have been part of the Hare Krishna lifestyle from the beginning, but some are decisively arranged and prompted by an emergent approach to befriend people by community involvement rather than evangelising. For example, the festival of Holi, an Indian spring festival celebrating colours and spring, has lately been introduced in the farm community, offering adults and children (from nearby and across the UK) light entertainment such as henna painting and similar contemporary trends.

Another organisational shift is manifested by an opening up to veganism, a tendency which is deemed contradictory by some members who argue that dairy use is an

important part of the belief which should not be neglected in the movement. However, pressing ethical and factory farm issues and a growing interest in vegan diets have led the community to offer outsiders purely plant-based alternatives at some of their charitable events. While opinions about the use of milk and dairy within Karuna Bhavan cause divisions, the wider organisation officially and increasingly discourages the use of supermarket products. Discussions of the dairy debate in the Scottish community are handled tactfully. While some members prefer veganism, the majority support supermarket dairy by arguing that milk as a sacred item is a necessary element of Hare Krishna practices. There is a general belief that by offering food to Krishna, he will bless the factory farm cow and even the workers on that farm, thus the *himsa* (violent) influences can be neutralised. But not everybody can identify with that.

Reciprocal relationships are established between nearby farmers and the eco-farm, based on the exchange of volunteers, skills, tools and produce. According to chief gardener Bhakti (Interview 5: Appendix 1), one of the main benefits of working on the land is to build relationships and promote spirituality that way. In his words:

We swap volunteers [with farm owners]. We swap knowledge. We... we.. Sometimes they [farmers] come here if we need help and some time we go and work there. It is just a community development. We help them and we get to them and they get to us. We co-operate with each other. They give fruit, advice, volunteers. And we get them... we invite them here and they have a meal. We try and get back to them by inviting them here giving them a meal and some spiritual knowledge and things you know. [...] Lot of friends. They either give fruit or vegetables or advice, professional advice or support like references, or make good connections with other people for us. Things like that. I don't know how many. How many I got involved through this project? Maybe I mean hundreds you know. Hundreds, yeah yeah at least. Who have got good impressions we are here. Close friends connected to the project maybe fifty I have got. That really close. Professional people, maybe I've got fifty friends like that which is – you know.

On a wider level, ISKCON sees it a missionary duty to step into the outside world to share Krishna practices and faith with as many people as possible. The selling and free

distribution of books is the preferred outreach activity, which corresponds to the founder's wish to prioritise printing books even over the construction of temples. Besides spreading the message, books secured a steady income for the community, but the profitability of this work is presently on decline. According to devotees' reports (e.g. Interview 10: Appendix 1), more than 1 million copies of *The Higher Taste* (a cookbook) was distributed in the wider region including Northern England. Presently, Sankirtan workers (canvassers), whose daily work made it possible to leave the farm, take part in book selling in rotation, each about one to four days a week. When someone is on duty, food, transport and all necessities are taken care of by others thus sharing the daily workload. During my fieldwork devotees mostly visited the cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh.

Apart from canvassing, the community maintains a social network that enables dissemination of dietary and other sustainable practices to the outside world. Festivals and open days, music, food and yoga events, outreach activities, a great variety of open-air and temple programmes attract visitors from all walks of life. (The number of annual visitors is not registered.) These outreach events are renowned for the special food served as a communion treat at the end of the programmes. The group use these events as opportunities to offer vegan food, as it is recognised as an intersection where different ethical viewpoints can be combined on grounds of compassion. The events organized by the community in Edinburgh and Glasgow are often held in public places where likeminded organizations proclaiming spiritual messages can meet and co-operate. There is an established connection between the eco-farm and the University of Glasgow where devotees hold contemplative meditation workshops at the university in the examination periods. When I attended one of these programmes there were about twenty people in class. Music and singing practices are also organized. Though

presently discontinued, there are plans to strengthen the already existing ties and activities between the farm and a university team working on sustainability research.

Yoga training offers another point of intersection between the community and yoga teachers and classes from the outside. The temple president explained how this kind of relationships are built and cultivated and how considerate measures are put in place in terms of outreach methods in general.

We have one friend up there [Aberdeen], she is a, she was a yoga teacher but now she is a teacher of yoga teachers, so she qualifies people to become teachers, so we had about maybe 10-12 people who were qualifying to be yoga teachers there and gave them a 3-hour seminar on introduction to Bhagavad Gita, and it went very well. They are looking to do more and their idea is that they filter it through their other classes, so that basically 12 yoga classes will be filtering through. This is just one outlet I think in due course of time this is going to spread more. Closer to home we are contacting yoga teachers who are interested in the meditation and the philosophy aspect, and the spiritual practices. And also through Glasgow University, we have contacted lot of students through there. There was 19 or 20 people there. That was very well received and we asked them did you like them, would you like us to do some more, and they said yeah, so we are scheduled to do another one next week. And I think it's gonna become quite popular because I was quite surprised how many people showed up. Edinburgh also, that's quite a wide range, it's in the Soul Centre which hosts quite a wide variety of people who are after alternative healing insights, practices and things, so we're finding that's quite good. A hub for people who find. We used to have two programmes, one was a class on Bhagavad Gita, and another one simply kirtan chanting. And we are making it quite accessible to people, because we don't go and dressed as regular Hare Krishnas, but we chant various mantras and if people are interested to go further, then we invite them to the next step. There are more steps according to the level of faith. So we are just trying to make things accessible for people. (Interview 14: Appendix 1)

Reading Groups

During my stay at Kauna Bhavan, pro-environmental attitudes were promoted through the weekly environmental discussions attended by devotees and volunteers alike. These discussions were based on a short reading followed by some questions that were answered or commented on by all participants. One of such readings was taken from a book on Hinduism and ecology (Prime, 1994). The short text focused on the dignity of

work, the 'sinfulness of waste' (62), exploitation and a non-violent economy taught by Gandhi and quoted in the book as follows: "It is a fundamental law of Nature that Nature produces enough for our wants from day to day; and if only everyone took enough for their own needs and nothing more, there would be no poverty in this world." (ibid.) (A similar quote alluded to Gandhi: "The world has enough for everyone's need but not for everyone's greed" often gets repeated in Hare Krishna circles.) Drawing upon this, the reading explains how under the British rule the raw materials produced in India were shipped to Britain for manufacturing, only to return them to India in the form of ready-made goods. By borrowing words from another source, the text sums up the situation as follows:

The field opposite grows cotton. The owner of the field sells it to a man who collects it. This man sells it to a dealer who sells it to another who transports it to Bombay, where it is sold to a shipper who ships it to an English port where it is sold to a factory which turns it into spun cotton and sells it to another factory which turns it into woven cloth and sells it to a dealer who sells it to a peddler who sells it in the village to the owner of the cotton field. [...] The proper economy is this: Let the owner of the field get hold of a spinning wheel and turn it, until his cotton field has clothed him, his family and the whole of his village. (ibid. 63)

The reading then goes on by explaining how Gandhi would have voiced his opinion against such an economy and even against passively supporting it. A possible solution is suggested by the symbol of the spinning wheel which Gandhi used one hour a day,

and he expected everyone to do the same. By that one hour a day, if everyone took it up, India could supply its own cloth and be freed from the tyranny of the cotton mill trade, which created dependence on Britain and mass unemployment in India. (ibid.)

The volunteers showed keen interest in these discussions, they contributed to their dynamics, and were also interested in the books kept in the library hall where the meetings were held. Apart from the purely spiritual books, a good sample of publications were available on the topics of organic farming, community gardening,

vegetarianism, climate change, compassion and environmental protection. Generally, books were collected, exchanged and discussed keenly at Karuna Bhavan. Another day of the week another class was held to teach Vedic philosophy and its close connections to ecology and nature. Wwoofers also attended involvement-based activities such as music lessons where special Indian instruments were played and taught. The free atmosphere of these events attracted them to try out music instruments and learn about the Krishna faith in general. The friendliness of the community made other programmes such as festivals organized for outsiders, workshops (e.g. wool-spinning), and the outreach activities enjoyable events.

Love and Devotion. Hare Krishna Prasadam and the Food Cycle

Krishna prasadam (Pictures 5; 12; 13: Appendix 4) becomes spiritual through offering it to Krishna, but preparing, and even growing it, is imbued with spiritual activities and steps of reflection that make Krishna food the centre of a bundle of more sustainable practices. To the believer, everything belongs to Krishna, and humans are not the owners of any material possessions, hence potential desires to accumulate wealth for the sake of accumulation are to be stifled by members. Money and material riches are not to occupy the mind of a devotee. This is also reflected in how labour is understood in the community. There is no need to rush, claim the devotees, in and out of activities to reach beyond the limits of bare necessities. Instead, acknowledging Krishna as the supreme Godhead and Creator, devotees and community members take time in contemplating on as well as carrying out every step of the food cycle. These steps include planting, preparation, offering, eating and sharing, and though they are performed with enjoyment, the original goal is to please Krishna over the self and

prepare the food for his pleasure. Once he accepts the offering, his blessings and mercy (in Sanskrit '*prasadam*') may and will translate into every soul who eats of the food thus treated. To the believer, Krishna and Krishna food are non-different entities. Food is transcendent, spiritual. "The whole cycle is doing things with love" – says the gardener in Lesmahagow, before describing it as follows:

We look after the earth, sow seeds nicely we look after them, we cultivate the plant when it is growing, we water it we weed it, we transplant it at the right time and transplant it to the right place, and we cultivate it by pruning or taking some leaves off sometimes, we look after the plant, and whatever is necessary and then we harvest and then we cook, and we cook with love, and then we offer it to Krishna in a bonifying way which is written in books, we say certain mantras, so then we serve it with love for the person's enjoyment. So, it's all about doing things out of love for others you see. And food is a great way of appealing to the other spiritually. Because everyone likes to enjoy and if you get someone a nice meal they get ... you know they also feel that love that you put into everything. They benefit from it, they feel loved you see. They feel that love you put into things you see. It is a great way of making peace in the world. Yeah it is great way... more people garden more people are connected spiritually then very quickly the world would change and people would be peaceful and happy. So, I feel very enthused about doing it because it is positive and that is a great way of serving and pleasing people. Because everyone eats. And they won't be able to do anything unless they eat... (Interview 5: Appendix 1)

Food for Krishna believers equals *prasadam* (the Lord's mercy), or rather, it becomes *prasadam* after it is offered to the Lord Krishna. The food can only be brought before the community after it has been offered first. Preparing, offering, and serving is done with love and devotion, L&D, and not LSD, as both the Karuna Bhavan and the global community playfully repeat the pun. Love towards other living beings and the transcendent God is a central and standard spiritual theme for members in both theory and practice. Devotees are very particular about the way food is handled from its minutest beginning, the seed, to its final disappearance from the dining table. In between these stages, and even before, at the preparation of the soil, the most cautious, conscious and conscientious steps are required to be taken (e.g. prayers, meditation, self-examination, cleaning, dressing). Love and devotion are key to the whole food

cycle. Food becomes a spiritual entity as much as it is material. Because all living creatures are respected, there is a detailed spiritual teaching taken from ancient Scriptures about what happens to plants and human beings when growing, harvesting and eating take place. According to the teaching, if love is infused into the food throughout the whole cycle of production and preparation, then that love will be transferred in the form of blessings and happiness to those who eat of it.

In contrast, if it is not prepared with love and not offered to the 'Lord', it will have malignant effects upon the consumer. Emanating from this spiritual notion, Krishna followers try to avoid supermarket food, and when it is not possible, they use their mobile altar kept in the home or in the car to offer the food before its use. "Yes, we offer it to Krishna" – said Bhakti.

We have an altar, we have a picture of the spiritual master in Krishna and we use a plate which is only used for Krishna; and we say Mantras and we ask Krishna to please accept this food, or we ask our spiritual master to please accept this food. And if we offer it with love that means if we just say the proper mantras and follow what is in the book then it is counted as love and ... so if it's done in the proper way and if it's done with love, Krishna will accept it. The food then becomes spiritual. It becomes non-different from Krishna, the person God. The food is spiritual to you. (Interview 5: Appendix 1)

Observing and participating in these practices on several Krishna farms, I noticed how the slow pace as well as consciousness of the process become sources of enjoyment for the believer. While consciousness is an explicitly and constantly emphasized factor of everyday Krishna life, tranquillity appears to be an implicit dimension of activities, as if to say (without saying): "the good life requires time, and we have no reason to rush it." For example, farming organically is time-consuming, but the chief gardener delightedly expressed that "if you grow organic food you don't destroy the earth in any way and in fact you are giving the earth" (ibid.).

Composting, again a lengthy process, is done to fertilize the soil, which is also part of the commitment to live in harmony with nature and grow nutritious, healthy foods. During my volunteering activity, I noticed buckets of organic tonic with comfrey slowly soaking in it for several weeks to provide the necessary protection and vitality for the plants. Prepared from locally grown, organic materials, the food is generally perceived to be more nourishing than bought food. I was told by the chef that in Indian temples

it's traditional that the food is grown within a certain radius of the temple. Not just the freshness aspect, but also for developing that err... dependency on the local community, and encouraging a lot of the local community to feel that their produce is being offered in that way. So, ideally, we would like to have that in here. (Interview 10: Appendix 1)

An appreciation of eating one's own produce is described this way:

Often if I eat at lunchtime and I know I ate the food I have grown myself I don't get hungry again until the next lunchtime. I noticed that, I have noticed that. Because there is a lot more, a lot more goodness in the food, because I am told fifty years ago you only had to eat a third of what you eat now, because the food isn't such good quality. So, I feel when I am growing my own that I don't have to eat as much. I feel that. I feel satisfied, I am getting the nutrients. (Interview 5: Appendix 1)

Once the ingredients are gathered, donated or purchased, food preparation can take place. Only a selected number of devotees are authorised to cook. At Karuna Bhavan, it was a rather exclusive process. Members – when they were newcomers – learnt how to cook from books rather than personal tutoring and cooking shows, which were completely lacking throughout my stay in the communities. Everyone I interviewed on this farm had some cooking skills, but these skills were not acquired through communal activities. Rather, it was spiritual drive that made them learn how to prepare prasadam. In some cases, one to one personal tutoring was reported when a friend more senior in faith supported a newcomer (generally of the same gender) in learning. Volunteers were forbidden to enter the kitchen or to take part in cooking in any way other than cleaning

vegetables in a separate place. The chef explained that cooking itself was a spiritual process which had to meet rigorous and detailed requirements and standards of cleanliness. It is to be characterised by love from the beginning to the end. It requires spiritual attention and love from the part of the kitchen master and all those involved. Cooking is discouraged when someone is in a bad mood or in a nervous state of mind, as this would transmit into the food to the detriment of the consumers.

Anyone who's not in pure consciousness will be affected by it. It's a very subtle thing, it won't be perceived, it will gradually result in a lessening of standards, lessening of enthusiasm, of spiritual life, it will gradually go down and no one will understand why. If a senior rank comes and sees that lessening of standards, they'll say who's the cook? Yeah, so I was saying...If the cook is worried about his marriage or worried about his business or something like that, then he shouldn't cook. (Interview 10: Appendix 1)

Love must enter the food in all circumstances, to benefit those who eat it after it becomes Krishna prasadam. The cook starts the work with a prayer. Praying serves to acknowledge one's responsibility and to remember his or her spiritual master (guru). As well as striving for cleanliness of the soul, he or she has to make sure that all surroundings are immaculately clean. The chef shared a story of how when a venerable devotee audited his work he was reproved because of a bird nesting on top of the glass roof where cooking took place. Cleanliness has hygienic as well as spiritual relevance. In the words of the cook:

there's an expression that's referenced in all languages that cleanliness connects to Godliness. And the reason for that is that everything is the property, of God, hmmm, so if we neglect to keep things clean then it's disrespect for God's property. That mentality of disrespect will lead to an unclear mind, so it's the responsibility of the cooks and everyone living in the ashram to keep things clean and tidy, and the main reason for keeping things clean and tidy is so that when dirt appears, it is immediately recognised and can be eliminated. So, in a similar way, if we keep our minds clean then when we have unclean thoughts, we immediately recognise them and remove them. (Interview 10: Appendix 1)

After preparation, another prayer is offered to

ask for forgiveness for any offences which we may have committed willingly or unwillingly, knowingly or unknowingly, involved in the procedure for offering the food. In terms of praying before we eat the food, then we say actually, well, there are 2 mantras we recite normally. [...] One cannot really attain perfection unless one eats the food which is remnants of the offering. So, there's paramount importance on eating this food. It's not just a preventative measure; it's not just preventing ill health, mental or physical ill health, it's necessary for spiritual advancement to eat this food. (ibid.)

Before serving the food in the dining room, it gets offered in a shrine in front of Krishna's statue. Part of the food is placed on a plate for the deity, and when the offering is over it is mixed into the rest of the food and taken into the dining room. It has now become Krishna prasadam. Meals are eaten together at Karuna Bhavan, a custom which was mentioned by some as appealing when they first joined the community. There are a few cultural, symbolic and local rules to remember, such as removing of shoes, washing of hands and specific ways for serving each other. Despite its unique complications, eastern hospitality is part of the lived experience. Special meals are served on Sundays when visitors join for worship and social activities.

Apart from the emotional and ethical, there is yet a scriptural aspect to eating which is also widely represented in the community. Taken from the ancient scripts of the Bhagavad-gita and the Srimad-Bhagavatam, three different modes of nature are distinguished. Though somewhat differing from the original texts²¹, Krishna believers frequently reference their understanding of the modes of eating as follows. 1: Mode of ignorance: meat and related items. 2: Mode of passion: spicy foods. 3: Mode of goodness: grains, fruit, nuts, legumes, vegetables. According to written and taught principles, the mode of eating will influence the temperament of the consumer. Krishna

²¹ "Foods in the mode of goodness increase the duration of life, purify one's existence and give strength, health, happiness and satisfaction. Such nourishing foods are sweet, juicy, fattening and palatable. Foods that are too bitter, too sour, salty, pungent, dry and hot, are liked by people in the modes of passion. Such foods cause pain, distress, and disease. Food cooked more than three hours before being eaten, which is tasteless, stale, putrid, decomposed and unclean, is food liked by people in the mode of ignorance." Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 17: Text 8-10

believers are not supposed to take stimulating substances such as coffee or tea. Likewise, the consumption of garlic, onion and mushrooms are not recommended, because they allegedly cause restlessness, de-concentration and other symptoms. "You don't need all these things" – says the head gardener before he continues:

The spirit has already got everything, you are already a complete person. You are made of love, you just need to love your life in a loving way and you don't need all these other things to stimulate. Just follow the recommended spiritual diet, you know. Although we don't say that people give up everything overnight. We don't say that to people. We just say: add Krishna as a gradual process. Add Krishna and it is a gradual process you see. We say like that. We don't expect people to give up everything you know. (Interview 5: Appendix 1)

Beyond the religious references, community members in Karuna Bhavan also place special emphasis on the health and environmental aspects of consuming the food of their choice. They claim that the Krishna diet is much healthier than its meat-based alternatives, and causes less harm to the environment. The way members talk about their diet attests to a thorough consciousness of the details and importance of what, why and how they eat. Supported by Krishna publications and education, members have a holistic approach to food, an approach that binds their community as well as their practices together. Vegetarianism is not just taken for granted on religious grounds, it is explained from a variety of angles. An Ayurvedic food called *kitchari* (rice and legumes mixed together) is used daily for the combination of protein and carbohydrates in one single dish. All community members connected to the eco-farm believe that this combination is beneficial to health as it contains the essential amino-acids the body itself cannot produce. This is how it is explained by a believer who as a fresh university graduate in engineering dedicated a period of his life to volunteer on the farm:

Kitchari basically is an Indian dish which is a mixture of pulses and rice and other beans. It's like a wholegrain dish, and just recently I've attended a class and in that they said that pulses are very good sources of protein you know. Human body

I think they need nine sources of protein in that pulses will contain around five, and rice has four, so when you make kitchari which is a mixture of rice and pulses and everything, basically it's like you have nine amino acids already, so pulses will provide like five amino acids, the rice will provide like 4 amino acids, and when you make kitchari, all these amino acids, nine amino acids will combine and make this polypeptide chain, so the necessity for eating protein is actually fulfilled when you eat kitchari. (Interview 6: Appendix 1)

Members are also particularly conscious of the fact that meat production requires far more natural, human and energy resources, hence the Krishna diet is environmentally more sustainable. They reason that their practices are less carbon-intensive than mainstream diets as they require less energy, less water, less deforestation and less transport. Organic farming is encouraged on similar grounds. Thus, the emotional, ethical and religious teachings are supplemented by purely rational reasoning to provide a holistic set of rules that guide vegetarian practices in the community. These rules appear to be engraved in the Krishna lifestyle to such a degree where both materials and skills necessary to perform practices appear to be overshadowed by them.

I Am a Wwoofer. Exploring the Farm and Diet Through the Eyes of Volunteers

One way to connect with Hare Krishna believers and practices is to volunteer on their Eco-Farms as a so-called wwoofer. Wwoofing [wu:fing] is a word mostly known to a generation of young people who are interested in World Wide Opportunities On Organic Farms. A wwoofer is someone who spends some weeks or months as a volunteer on one of the hundreds of eco-farms listed in the scheme worldwide (Pictures 16-17: Appendix 4). The www.wwoof.net website and organization (established 1971) connects organic farms and growers with volunteers. On my arrival at Karuna Bhavan I found five male and one female volunteers. Most of them were in their twenties, and came from Guatemala, Belgium, the United States, France, Germany, Mauritius, India and Italy. I also visited the farm in the capacity of a wwoofer. I participated in the daily

work and was regarded as a worker rather than a researcher. During the four weeks of my stay I formed close working relations with most of the volunteers on the farm. Though they all came for their individual reasons, a disenchantment with serving the ‘capitalist’ society in their bank, navy, or other places was common among them. A general disillusionment with the outside world and a search to experience alternatives characterized the lives of most of them, while only a few were content with their everyday circumstances. The reason for disillusionment was an overwhelming sense of emptiness in the market-orientated, materialistic world. This created a drive for personal lifestyle change in terms of engaging in meaningful labour, for an example.

As Thomas from Belgium put it:

Well I started working in the bank because I heard it from a lot of people I needed to start working to earn money. And in the beginning I was very motivated, because yes the pay was good, the prospects of making a nice career were there to work there until I retired. I had good prospects, so I was very motivated to follow the trainings they gave me and to learn about the job. But then as I learnt more about the job as I yeah as I worked there in the bank I started yes to have some doubts about my work and about my environment I was in. Most importantly I felt that I wasn’t really satisfied with the work I was doing. It was, in my eyes, it was very superficial. You were dealing with people in the most materialistic way possible so yes I it was important to me that I could help people and I did not have this feeling there. [...] Then I started thinking about that and about my own situation and I was no longer convinced that this system contributed to, yes to the happiness of people. It helped definitely to create material well-being and all these things, and wealth and richness, but I felt personally, and I saw those around me that this was no longer contributing to the happiness of people. People were very stressed because of this very, yes, materialistic, very focused-on-money career, and because of this they only had stress. Yes, because I thought that the goal of society for people was working together, so that we can increase our chance for survival and increase our happiness. And I came to see that the way society works it does not help people, but on the contrary, it stops them, it makes them unhappy, it makes them unhealthy, so I got completely disillusioned with my environment. I did not see any point in it, so I decided to leave. (Interview 4: Appendix 1)

Thomas’ narrative recalls accounts of Hare Krishna interviewees who first joined the Krishna community not because they were seeking religious ties but because they were dissatisfied with the ‘system’ and their ‘own situation’ in it. Thomas as a visitor found

points of convergence with the collective Krishna identity through his interest in community living, permaculture and food. He found spiritual explanations to his questions, which he regarded as ‘inspiring’ and ‘very good’, something he could relate to his personal development. In his words:

Their teachings are quite similar [to how I think]. Like material well-being is not equal to yes, actually, happiness, I don’t know if there is another word for it. But I think they explain it in a way that yes, which is new to me. In a religious way. They believe in a separation between the material worlds and the spiritual worlds, and they believe that in essence we are a soul, we belong to the spiritual world not to the material world, so with this logic we cannot find happiness in the material world. For them. This is logic. I understand this explanation, it is good. (ibid.)

Thomas also emphasised his fascination with the idea of nature and cow protection, which he read in a book in the community’s library soon after his arrival. The book that was written on compassion and diet explained that

the cow produces too much milk for its own children, so if we take care of the cow and the cow gives us milk and we live together with the cow, this was something I liked because I think it is best not to consider animals as enemies or something, but we live with them, we need them. Even small insects, we need them. Need the worms to make good compost for example. We need bugs and birds for the fields to keep the eco-system balanced, is very, yeah, animals are important to us. It is important that we respect them. Even aside from that, they are conscious beings. (ibid.)

As part of the escape from mainstream society, learning about food and organic farming techniques were among the leading drivers of interest for wwoofers. To some, Karuna Bhavan was not the first farm they visited, the reason mostly being to become acquainted with different farming experiences or to potentially settle on a smallholding in the future. Vegetarianism is a general characteristic of most of the wwoofing farms. The role of these volunteering visits for dietary change was most remarkably expressed by Pierre from France. Pierre reported that on the horse rescue farm he previously worked for the owner was vegan, and by the time he left the farm he did not fancy egg and dairy any more. He got used to living without them during the weeks. Both the

compassionate atmosphere and the lack of these materials helped him to get accustomed to new dietary practices.

However, whilst on duty and working together in the garden, Pierre also told me his story about backslidings when he was trying to make lifestyle changes in France. He was easily influenced by peer-pressure. He could not exclude alcohol from his life in his home environment, and he does not think he could ever omit meat from his diet, either. In contrast, working on the eco-farms helped him to learn and follow alternative practices. He feared when he would get back to normal routine everything would be the same as before, and this was one of the reasons for quitting his job and coming abroad to volunteer. He was now making plans to acquire a piece of land for himself.

Another reason named for volunteering on the farm was to find a ‘soul-healing place’ and possible help to clear away ‘past stuff’ (Interview 1: Appendix 1). Music, guitar and yoga lessons were among the attractions perceived to be therapeutic for the soul. The flexibility and amiability of the group was also manifested by the way they welcomed volunteers suffering from psychiatric problems or addictions. On several occasions, I observed the patience and care with which mentally disturbed people were handled. As long as no potential harm was caused, said the devotees, the community was happy to welcome these patients. Some members living on the farm, and several sympathisers who moved to its close vicinity (in the village), came from backgrounds of alcohol, drug or other addictions. They explained how helpful the spiritual and non-judgmental atmosphere proved to support them on their journey to recovery, which was especially needed during periods of relapse. Some of these patients chose to remain on or near the farm to volunteer in return for continued community support, Krishna food and spiritual teachings. The head gardener, now a long-time devotee, is one of those who recovered on the farm.

The spirituality of food was presented to the wwoofers through multiple channels. We were carefully taught how to serve others and ourselves by adhering to strict hygienic standards like washing of hands before sitting down to eat, and at each time we wanted to leave the table to take or serve more food. This felt a bit complicated. We also took part in outreach events and served special food as a community feast at the end of the programmes.

The volunteers in general found Krishna food delicious and palatable though somewhat monotonous. A few had already experimented with the preparation of vegetarian dishes, but for some it was their first encounter with a meat-free diet. The wwoofers would have liked to take part in cooking shows or cook together with the appointed cooks, but they were told it was in conflict with spiritual principles. This meant that Krishna food was brought close to the wwoofers in a variety of ways (events, talks, cookery books etc.) but was kept distant through the lack of the most direct means: participatory learning.

But this was not the main criticism offered by the volunteers. They found that the Krishna community seemed to be locked in a partiality to Indian cultural fascination. To them, principles of faith were sometimes conflated with cultural appearances. Though ISKCON was purposefully founded to bring the Hindu faith to the other side of the world in a 'westernized' form, it was still felt distant to volunteers (and even some members) who found the use of Indian words, names, clothes and customs and even food ingredients somewhat disturbing. In my experience, it was not always easy to remember all the Indian names devotees use after their initiation. Outsiders lacking the experience may find it uncomfortable at times to socialize and mingle with Krishna believers.

Similarly, the unique Krishna dress, hair style, painted nose and forehead, and the sight and sound of chanting and praying out loud might seem appealing to some but odd and off-putting to others. What, above all, was most prominently noticed by volunteers was the gender imbalance both in proportion and behaviour. Female devotees were hardly present in the company of male volunteers, and on most occasions, would not even greet them at all, just walked by them silently, avoiding eye-contact. While the devotees made efforts to justify the situation on cultural grounds, volunteers uttered their disapproval by using some unprintable words. Here are some of the printable versions:

There are lady monks here as well. But they live, in my impression, a bit next to the men not together with the men, for example they eat at separate tables in the dining hall, they... yes, for example when I was working in the fields, they just walk by, they don't make eye-contact at all. They just walk by when you say Hello. Some they don't even answer you so it's very, to me it's a bit weird, and the explanation that I heard about this is very strange to me. It's all about this sex thing, they are afraid if men and women interact, they will have sex immediately, which is a very weird way of thinking because ... yes ... this is strange. For example, they do not accept female wwoofers for the reason that female volunteers, they will distract the male volunteers from the work. So again, this is something that's not very logical to me, yeah... if I may say so it's a bit stupid reasoning, it's not a good, not good. And also, if for example to deal with the public it makes a very strange impression, because I think if I had known this before I came here I would not have come. Simple. (Interview 6: Appendix 1)

Salina, the only female volunteer present (as her application had been approved years before), expressed it this way:

But the other, and in a way, more serious reason that bothers me more is something has to do with distracting the monks or making it difficult for the men in this community, and to me that's just demonizing women, because then you are saying those men are not responsible for their own decisions and their own behaviour. If they decide to be celibate, or you know whatever they decide to do, that's what they decided to do and it's up to them to be committed to that. If they can't cope with women being around then that's their problem, and women shouldn't have to suffer because they can't cope with that. And also, if it's to do with their kind of spiritual practice and involving spiritually, if you are in an environment where you don't have to make any choices or there is no temptations or whatever, then how real is that? It's only if you're able to withstand a bar of chocolate and you made a commitment not to eat that bar of chocolate, or not to eat meat, or whatever it is, it's very easy if there is none of it around, but it doesn't mean that you are spiritually advanced. It's being able to say no to it. Also, I find

quite odd or not odd, typical, that, errr, why is it that the men have to be protected? And why are they saying, like if it is a problem of male and female volunteers getting together, why not say that well, women can come, but men can't come? But they would never do that. So why is it always the women that have to be pushed aside? You know it makes this place seem very backward and very kind of typical in a way, in terms of the way that the women have been treated in different religions over the centuries. I find it quite upsetting really. (Interview 7: Appendix 1)

To conclude, volunteers on Krishna farms find opportunities to learn about practices that are not readily available in the outside world. Most of the woofers on the farm came disillusioned with society, with an interest in alternative livelihoods, and some of the practices and philosophies they found harmonised with their search for identity. Food and gardening were the leading attractions, but spirituality and compassion were also on the list of their good experience. At the same time, they openly expressed their concerns about some of the cultural gender norms, which they found off-putting and 'upsetting'.

Generally, and globally, most woofers stay on the farms for a few months, after which they carry the Krishna practices, or some of their elements, to their new locations. I keep in touch with some through social media, and to be certain, practices do travel and continue their life in new arrangements. Thomas, for example, on leaving Karuna Bhavan, returned to a Buddhist farm he had previously visited in Ireland, and he now considers himself a follower of Buddha. At present, he is back in Brussels, working for a vegan restaurant. The cooking competence he could not obtain on the Krishna farm is now acquired in another configuration. He found spiritual motifs and inspiration for the Krishna dietary practice, namely a close connectivity with nature and animal compassion. These spiritual triggers, in a more refined, vegan configuration, landed in a Brussels restaurant which is neither Krishna nor Buddhist in philosophy, but which offers food that is more sustainable. On the other end of the scale, another volunteer

from the United States who did not particularly like Krishna food said that his woofing experience made him consider changing his diet, but in the long run only. He reported:

I am getting to do the small changes in my own life and my lifestyle habit... saying saying that I will give up meat completely in the future is a little – I don't know that. But I know for the most part I do want to adapt a like an 80 what is called an 80 percent vegetarian diet you know, overall, whereas before I was 90 percent meat diet. [...] Although I wasn't like a huge fan of the food, the daily food, right, I think some of the dishes will be an excellent addition to a weekly plan you know, maybe three times a week or, or whatever, you know, but getting to know different vegetarian dishes [...] because my view on vegetarian dishes was really narrow. But having that expanded to to these these dishes I would be more inclined to practice that in my own home and then replicate those dishes. (Interview 1: Appendix 1)

From Omnivorous Hippy to Vegetarian Devotee

Most members at Karuna Bhavan found their way to the faith through some food-related event. In the very few cases where food was not particularly liked initially, it became appreciated later. Some were attracted to the community through ideas of food growing, organic gardening, or simply the spirituality it offered. Several members reported to have experienced the community's patience with addicts and their relapses. In their experience, the outdoor activities, community programmes, clearer spiritual and mental discernment were supportive during processes of change, whether they required short or long periods of time. In some instances, the transition took years, sometimes decades. The community atmosphere converts find themselves entering during or after their conversion experiences was reported to be highly encouraging.

In what follows, I describe in detail one conversion story to demonstrate the depth and uniqueness of possible narratives in ethically galvanised eco-spiritual communities. As the historicity of change is one important point to emphasise, quoting smaller sections

from several interviews would not shed as much light as the more detailed presentation of a single case.

Hare Krishna devotee Michael (pseudonym) had been leading a hippy life in the English countryside when he once, walking across a field, eye witnessed the birth of a calf. As he saw the immediately formed, tender and intimate bond between mother and calf, instantly he experienced a change of mind that has never left him since. The experience was triggered by the way mother and calf looked at each other and mother was ‘licking off the mess’ from the baby. It was obvious from then onwards that he would not be eating anything ‘that has four legs’ any more. “It was a very emotional moment” – concludes Michael (Interview 9: Appendix 1).

But the story did not end there for that day with the calf. To demonstrate the qualitative depth of such experiences, I cannot do better than to quote Michael’s own words:

And then I walked on, and then that night I set at the harbour and I ... in those days, in those days I still used to eat fish. So, in those days I still used to eat fish, and that night I sat at the harbour with my fishing rod and started catching some fish to eat, but after a bit I got strangely greedy and just kept like fishing, just kept like catching them, killing and catching and killing them. After about ten fish, it just suddenly happened, I saw the last one looking at me with its eye, you know, like: what’s going on? – as I was about to kill it. And I felt this sort of strange feeling, as I was being watched. Not paranoia, because it was dark in the middle of nowhere, but there was this feeling that I’ve done something very wrong and somebody has seen me do it. Because I’d just used to think, well if I kill it I can eat it you know, it it’s OK because I wasn’t, I hadn’t met the woman yet, didn’t know about Krishna or anything. [...]

This was a few weeks before I met this lady, so I thought, well I would now eat them as I killed them, apart from the last one that I threw back in the water. So, I went into a public toilet to find a plastic bag you know, a bin bag to put the fish in. So, there were a few items in the bottom of this bag, so I emptied them on the floor, and what fell out was a pornographic magazine. So, I thought we don’t want that around, that’s sort of thing. I was raised by Catholics and it’s just a bad thing but as I lifted it to move it, a little book fell out of it and it was a Hare Krishna book. The Nectar of Instruction. And it was in a pornographic magazine in a toilet, so I must have been led to that by some sort of an angel or something like that. So, as I was sitting down and reading it, and I just threw all the fish back in the sea, even though they were dead. I just didn’t want anything to do with them and I sat up all night in a cave on a beach, and was very secluded, and just

read the whole of this book by the candles and I began to see there was a better life you know than being like a hippy and smoking dope and going and killing fish, and stuff like that. And that walking about across the countryside is beautiful, but it's not necessarily gonna take you to the love and back to God. As it actually keeps you here sort of thing. So then, a few days after that I was sitting back on this cave outside it with my little coffer, and I had some bread that had gone a bit hard, I couldn't eat it. So, I was sitting there, just throwing the bread to the seagulls, and I began to watch them, and I could see they all had different personalities. They weren't just a seagull, every seagull was different to the other seagull. Then there were other kind of birds coming there and then because I was kind of on a seeking myself pilgrimage you know, to find myself and all that. I was seeing lots of spiritual things, like herons would land with the seagulls, and then crows from forest would land, and lots of tiny little birds that were, you know, squeaking about and I was just feeding them and I was thinking like, I was thinking: look at me I am like St. Frances of Assisi you know, because he was very godlike and he liked the animals. And then I began to watch them and think chickens are the same as these, they are birds as well, and I'd been eating lots of chicken, especially in my Chinese food, and I thought no, no, I can't any more, you know, like that. [...] Yeah. The birds. So, I decided to stop eating mammals and fish and birds, all in like a matter of two or three weeks. And then, just a week or so afterwards, as I was just walking through the town with my wife, and then I saw that lady called ..."

Then Michael goes on to relate his experiences in gradually understanding and accepting the messages of Krishna, which he first received with wariness and doubtful suspicion. The lady mentioned in the quote above was an 'angelic', 'motherly figure', a devotee initiated by Srila Prabhupada during his time in the United Kingdom. This woman introduced Michael to the teachings of the Krishna faith as well as the food which he remembers to have received with great appreciation. Again, in his words:

So, I began to think at first that maybe it was another cult you know. Maybe it was another man with lots of Rolls-Royce cars and people going around blindly worshipping him. But then, I kind of... it was the food that got me, but not just the wonderful taste and how cheap it is to make it you know, it was the fact that it's good, honest food you know. There are no additives or anything in there, it's just food that was cooked well over five thousand years in India and it's kept all those Indians alive you know, that maybe just kitchari you know, the rice and dahl and vegetable you know.

So, it's got a pedigree you know it goes back thousands of years. It wasn't just invented like you know the Italians giving us pasta meals or the Belgians giving us, they brought fish and chips, that idea to here. It's not just pizzas or McDonalds, it's a food that goes back forever and ever and ever until the days when the gods were on Earth and you know they ate that food. So, it's just so special. And then you find out that you can't actually taste it while you are

cooking it. You are not really supposed to smell it or taste it because it's got to go to God first. So, that takes skill and trusting, confidence that when you offer it, God will make it alright even if you make a few mistakes.

Michael also explained that he found something 'magical' about the food and that the community made him feel at home:

I went to their programme and it just felt at home, going after all those years in solitude in the mountains and forest. And of course the food came in, the prasadam, and in there the cook is in my opinion the best cook in ISKCON, there is something magical about it. I can't get enough of it. I once asked her: what do you put in it that makes it so special, and she said L&D. And I thought: what, like LSD? And she went: no, it stands for Love and Devotion. So, that's a magic ingredient.

Later Michael detailed how he gradually accepted the faith, a journey which was highly supported by Krishna food and the vegetarian diet he had already embraced. For him, as well as most others, the story of dietary change began on his own, to be continued through the support of the community he found later. It was first and foremost animal compassion that prompted him to quit certain types of foods, but it becomes obvious, especially from the rest of the conversation, that he showed great awareness of issues of health, too. His new identity matched with the collective identity of the Krishna group that shared similar views on theological grounds. Indeed, his lifestyle transiting from a hippy mountain-dweller and dope user radically changed within a reasonably short time, while changing his diet only took him the course a few weeks. Michael is in his retirement age now. Decades have passed since the eyes of mother and calf, fish and fisherman met in moments of transformation. It appears from his account that when moments of change arrive in the form of eco-spiritual conversion, the grip of a new diet is not only strong and tenacious, but long-lasting as well. At least it happened to be so in his case.

In the Krishna community, timing in the succession of events is an important element in the conversion narratives. Just as the mother-like figure appeared at the right time to

help Michael forward on his journey to faith (he had had life-changing experiences by then), others recall similar moments of serendipity on their way of search. This is how Eddy conveys it:

I was walking through Liverpool centre and I saw some of the devotees who gave me a leaflet about vegetarianism, self-realization, meditation, and that was I was looking for at the time. I was interested in God and stuff so I went along. [...] Well it was the Radha time [a Krishna festival], I went there on Sunday. It was the Saturday that I got the leaflet. And why, because I was looking for something in my life relating God and it was like the final piece of the jigsaw puzzle for me when I went along you know. [...] It came at the right time. As I say it was sort of like the complete picture. There was always like mass and stuff in my life and it was like the final thing. (Interview 3: Appendix 1)

Eddy, as some others in the community, was also interested in gardening, another option on Krishna farms to make identification easier for those already familiar with growing, and for novices, too.

The first point of convergence in Michael's case was compassion and food. 'It was the food that got me', he said, and while this typically characterises how outsiders find interest in the community, their transition cannot be reduced to food-related spirituality alone. Among the devotees on the farms there were university graduates who were disillusioned by what science, careers and mainstream society had on offer. Krishna alternatives were described by these members as meaningful and 'happy' forms of engagement and belonging as opposed to the 'miserable' state of the outside world. The subject of food, offered free of charge, is hardly ever missing from these accounts. This was the experience of Saranga, a philosophy graduate, who was supervising the wwoofers during my fieldwork. Saranga explained that while at university he was not satisfied with the answers lecturers gave to his burning questions. After becoming a heavy drinker he found peace through the Krishna teachings and lifestyle. This is how he remembers his initial steps – and especially the free food offered – when a friend invited him to a community event:

You know he was very happy, teaching Sanskrit, you know he was having a great time and he didn't graduate though and I graduated, and I was like miserable you know. Look, I graduated, you failed you know, I should be happy, you know. What is this, you know? So, he invited me along to the weekly meetings in the crypts of St John Church, so I got along there for every week for a few months. Didn't understand anything that was spoken, he was giving the class, but I went along because they had very nice free fruit food, free fruit salad so I just ate that and I just paused, I just ate that for months. (Interview 11: Appendix 1)

Alienated from the perceived money-seeking culture and animal cruelty (factory farming and vivification were mentioned) around the 1980s, some found solace in Krishna music, dance, singing and meditation after already seeking alternatives in punk or vegan lifestyles as forms of resistance to the mainstream (Interview 10: Appendix 1). In several cases, other important points of attraction were mentioned, such as gardening and eating together. Bhakti the chief gardener at Karuna Bhavan explained:

One thing that attracted me was the opportunity to grow food because I was growing food since I was 10. And the singing and dancing and the whole lifestyle did attract me but even in the first few months when I started coming along here I was growing food in 1989 because people in charge knew I liked growing food so... I just had a lot of vegetable patch to begin with, small vegetable patch, 25 yards by 25 yards, I grew things on my own. [...] I wanted to learn how to grow food properly. I was always keen but I didn't know how to grow on a reasonably large scale so... I wanted to learn properly how to do crop rotation, how to get the soil right, what to plant, when to plant, and what to plant together. Even the training was good for regulation, lifestyle regulation. Actually, one of the best things about this was I found the gardening was very good for making friendships and developing good community. I never made an occasion of eating before I came to the temple. I never made occasion. I just ate because I had to, because my mother put it in front of me, but I never really enjoyed, or never really... But at times I enjoyed choc and sweets and some food yeah but I didn't make an occasion of eating you know, and... but then when I came to the temple the food was so delicious and the ... Eating together and sharing was very nice as well. It was a nice occasion. You could eat outside in the sunshine that was a nice time to get to know others and have a nice time with others, so I very much enjoyed that. (Interview 5: Appendix 1)

Another point to add is the healing process the community tacitly offered to those fighting with addictions. The community has proved to be receptive and patient with those joining for spirituality as well therapeutic labour. The possibility of incremental, gradual change, and even of slipping back, was experienced by Bhakti as follows:

I'd be honest and not say [change occurred] all of a sudden. I had periods of five years when I didn't follow all the principles, then I had another two years following all the principles, then I had a period of five years when I followed most of the principles. It's been like that you see. But now I have sorted my life, I am in a good situation where I can follow everything you see. So, it is like that. I like to appeal to the public, you know. I say, well, you know you don't need to give up everything, you take up spiritual life and you know naturally you will change. And you don't really have to change as a person. You already are a beautiful person. You already are a beautiful person. You just have to realize that. [...] I am not recommending people drink. But I am just saying that even if you don't want to follow everything don't let it put you off being spiritual. That is not the idea. The idea is you add the spiritual aspect to your life and then naturally you will change in habits. If you are with people who don't drink and you are enjoying yourself then you won't drink. If you are with people who drink and they enjoy themselves then you will drink. So it's like that. You know. (Interview 5: Appendix 1)

Interestingly however, not all those living in the community found the first encounters as pleasing as most others. Brian, who was also a recovering alcoholic at the time, cleaved to the community solely because of its spiritual teachings in its scriptures, and not because of the lifestyles practiced by members.

Coming from a Western background, I found the dress of the devotees very strange and off-putting. And the foods, the style of food, the Indian style of cooking, I wasn't used to the burning of incense, the chanting of Indian mantras, so I found that a bit scary. [...] It was hard to get used to non-Western dishes, and kitchari, although I always liked the idea of having just a big stew with all the nutrients in it without any fancy things without any side dishes just one blob of stuff and you eat it and that's where you get all your nutrients and have a drink and then you've got your day you know. So, yes, but I have got used to things you know to the different foods, I got used to the different dress, to say Indian things like Haribo, and Goranga, which was very alien to me at first, but I still think, I still think there is too much copying of Indians in the movement. And I've got some musical skills so I was trying to compose kirtans in a Western style on the guitar, because I thought I don't want to be an Indian, I am Scottish you know. So I was doing a Maha Mantra to popular songs like What a lucky man, like Neil Young tunes and I just dress like a Westerner. I don't like to dress in any Indian clothes. But with regard to diet I think I'd like to see more things like you know Hare Krishna pizza, spaghetti Bolognese, Goulash, everyone these days they eat a large variety of food, Chinese takeaways, Indian takeaways, Italian takeaways, so why confine ourselves to traditional Indian foods, why not expand the vegetarianism into other, our own traditional cooking and that of other people? (Interview 8: Appendix 1)

Despite all these aspects he found off-putting, Brian gradually embraced vegetarianism and the philosophies taught by the Krishna believers. Although still struggling with

addictions, he has been a faithful vegetarian for nearly two decades now. In nearly every other case at Karuna Bhavan, besides a general alienation from consumerist lifestyles, 'Krishna food', 'prasadam', or 'free food' was a crucial marker of identification with the group and its philosophy. Ahimsa (non-violent) or Karma-free (not bringing about bad fate) food served as a dividing line between the old and the new. However, dietary change is only a part of the transitioning process. Whether the transformation is slow or quick, a whole set of lifestyle practices follow in a bundle when converts join the Hare Krishna farm communities. Teachings, for example, serve as positive feedbacks to remain on the path of practices that offered 'conscious' alternatives to the previously 'miserable' lifestyle they were leading. Further on, after joining the community, the daily enactments engrave into the life (habitual) practices that would be very hard to break, given the spatial, temporal and spiritual arrangements in the community. Other than just diet, a whole bundle of practice conditions a lifestyle that remains low on CO₂ emissions. These practices, through enjoyment, also serve as feedbacks for conversion experience and the teachings of the faith. Identification, spirituality and practices create a dynamic bond that makes the ongoing practices of vegetarianism a long-lasting, dominant project for Krishna followers. The spiritual aspects of food, prepared and offered with love and devotion, and the whole orthodoxy and orthopraxy of the Krishna community, continues to make a tenacious grip upon devotees' life. To reiterate Bhakti's words: "The idea is you add the spiritual aspect to your life and then naturally you will change in habits." Spirituality appears to be key in the auto-narratives.

CHAPTER 6. THE BHAKTIVEDANTA MANOR, WATFORD, UK (CASE 2)

Introducing the Farm

Bhaktivedanta Manor has about forty-five residents (2017), of whom there are twenty-seven monks and eighteen nuns. In addition, there are about twenty wwoofers working on the farm. There are fifty employees, some three-hundred regular volunteers and about eighteen-hundred Sunday congregation attendees. During 2016, the residents and congregation of Bhaktivedanta Manor distributed about 180,000 of Srila Prabhupada's books in and around London. Financial resources for the centre must be raised independently from the global organisation. The eco-farm near Watford has working or servicing departments which are responsible for their own financial decisions and obligations. Raising funds and paying salaries to the devotees living outside is challenging as British living expenses and housing rates are high. This challenge is met by sales activities (ahimsa dairy products, restaurant menus, books, gifts), canvassing, fund-raising, weddings, feasts and eco-tourism. Currently (2017) a large-scale development project to extend the amenities is being marketed on billboards, handout materials and online by promising sponsors 'eternal shelters' in return for help. The text reads:

The Haveli is the house that will forever sing out the glories and teachings of Shree Krishna, passing culture, traditions and the life of bhakti to each new generation. It is the completion of Srila Prabhupada's dream for Bhaktivedanta Manor. And as Prabhupada blessed George Harrison back in 1973 for giving shelter to us, so too will he bless us with the eternal shelter of Lord Krishna for giving shelter to our next generation by building the Shree Krishna Haveli.

Here, too, the temporal and spatial arrangements determine practices to be spiritually infused and enacted. Compared to Karuna Bhavan, deity worship becomes more visible by the fact that the temple and its rooms – situated in the Manor – are used for other

communal purposes such as reception or dining. It is not rare to see devotees to lie flat on the floor to express adoration to Krishna and Srila Prabhupada whose statues are erected in the temple room as well the room he occupied in the Manor in 1973 and 1977. Devotees spend time in his rooms studying, praying and meditating. Outside the temple, a Tulasi shrine attracts Hindu believers (not only Hare Krishnas) to worship the *tulasi* (*ocimum tenuiflorum*: holy basil) tree and a devoted woman called Vrinda devi. According to ancient Hindu legends, before her incarnation into the tulasi plant, Vrinda became wife of the Lord Vishnu (or Krishna) himself. To remember and worship her, Krishna believers cultivate tulasi plants and pray before them reverently, by removing their shoes, kneeling and often lying on the floor in adoration. This plant must not be treated by chemicals, and it is grown and cultivated with the greatest care. Tulasi leaves are used to offer food to Krishna, and its wood provides material for the chanting beads and necklaces worn by believers. Some devotees walk around the tulasi shrine to perform their chanting. Chanting near these plants is regarded as mobilising special spiritual forces. The shrine is normally closed, and the plants are worshiped from outside through glass doors and windows. Devotees at Bhaktivedanta Manor spend a considerable amount of time in religious activities. Spirituality is translated into most everyday practices in the community, even showering and dressing.

Apart from the religio-spiritual aims, environmental sustainability occupies a central place in the teachings and practices of the farm. The establishment attracts hundreds of visitors, tourists and friends weekly from London and across the country. Sundays are special occasions when followers of Krishna and other Hindu faiths meet to share in devotional and recreational activities. On these days, religious services may be attended and time spent with family and community gatherings in the nearby fields that also offer dining facilities and a playground.

The centre is located in a 70-acre land and attracts supporters and eco-visitors who wish to experience the tranquillity of the place and taste the unique Krishna food. Visitors may learn about sustainable practices such as oxen yoke ploughing, organic farming and milk production (Picture 29: Appendix 4). The community's exclusively manual farming activities make it an exemplary case for sustainability education which is one of the main attractions for outsiders.

Two major ecological achievements in the community are the total eradication of fuel-based technology from food production, and an extensive daily food distribution programme that has been running for several decades. One major challenge is to remain unaffected by unsustainable influences and by the high number of visitors (250,000 visits annually). For example, living standards are expensive in the region, making it hard to raise necessary income to sustain the devotees who live outside the farm. Short distance from London may negatively impact the tranquillity of the farm through frequent business activities and car use.

Historical Overview

The Sanskrit title Bhaktivedanta was given to Srila Prabhupada by the Gaudiya Vaishnava Society in 1947 (*bhakti*: devotion; *vedanta*: knowledge). Using the same name in recognition of ISKCON's founder, the Manor (Picture 20: Appendix 4), as it is frequently called, was established near the town of Watford (16 miles northwest of London) in 1973. The property was donated to the ISKCON by George Harrison of the Beatles. In 1966 the Lennon family hosted Srila Prabhupada in their home for several weeks. In 1967, The Beatles travelled to India and on returning to London their fascination of Indian spirituality lead to the establishment of close friendships with

Hare Krishna devotees and even an album consecrated to the Krishna Temple by George Harrison. Since its establishment, the Manor has become the UK centre of the ISKCON movement, listing some 250,000 visits a year.²²

To have reached this level of popularity, a number of historical contingencies had had to play their part. Mantra songs recorded by John Lennon and the Beatles, and additional funds from George Harrison meant a powerful support to the organisation at its fledgling stage in the 1970s. Other rock bands and musicians served as sources of encouragement for the movement through sympathising with Krishna culture and vegetarianism (e.g. Paul McCartney). Another surge of unexpected development took place in 1972, when, quoting from the Manor's official website,

more than 100,000 Hindu Indians were expelled from the former British colony of Uganda in Africa. Holding British passports, they came and settled largely in London. The majority of them were already followers of Krishna and when they came to know that there were temples in the London area they quickly became visitors, then firm friends and supporters.²³

Decades of fighting to save the Manor between 1981 and 1996 also brought the institution into the public spotlight and media attention.²⁴ Referring to major traffic increase and citizen complaints, Hertsmere Council decided to ban public worship at the temple, an action followed by protests, court cases and legal appeals. The ongoing struggle was in need of political and financial support, and drew thousands of national and international supporters to its cause, including members of parliament and business people.²⁵ ISKCON had proposed that a new access road around the village [Aldenham] be built to settle the issue, but the proposal was refused. On 16 March 1994, "36,000 people gathered in Westminster, in central London, the largest religious gathering in

²² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KOHA_65KNEA (data confirmed by secretary)

²³ http://www.bhaktivedantamanor.co.uk/home/?page_id=8

²⁴ http://www.bhaktivedantamanor.co.uk/home/?page_id=7

²⁵ *ibid.*

the world outside of India. People came from all over the country in a display of unity behind ISKCON.”²⁶ In 1996, the ban was lifted and the community received full authority to operate on the property which also increased in size from seventeen to seventy acres as a result of additional land acquisitions to make the access road around the village possible. The access driveway was finally built, and the extended land provided more space for visitors, religious festivals as well as parking. Today, several thousands of people visit the farm weekly with more than two-thousand meals prepared each Sunday. Annual, public and national festivals attract tens of thousands of visitors from around the world. One major strength of the community lies in its wide social network that includes supportive musicians and rock bands such as the Sex Pistols, the Clash, and Pete Doherty from The Libertines.

Personal Impressions

During my stay on the farm, where I spent about three weeks in all, I was impressed by the natural environment, especially the well-kept gardens and retreat areas (Picture 39: Appendix 4). To help visitors, neat signposts give directions and information about expected behaviour regarding dress-code, smoking and meat consumption (Picture 27: Appendix 4). Next to the arrival area there is a contemplative garden dedicated to the theme of spirituality and vegetarianism (Pictures 24-26: Appendix 4). At the entrance, a poster advocates meat-free Mondays with Paul McCartney, a dedicated supporter of the community’s food projects. Rock bands, soloists and actors are portrayed as either vegetarians or sympathizers in promoting equality in the world. On a separate poster, famous people such as Tolstoy, Einstein and Leonardo da Vinci are portrayed, together

²⁶ *ibid.*

with their photographs, in support of the vegetarian ethos. Children can also take a lesson home by studying pictures displayed on the garden wall to explain non-violent practices on their level.

Entering the central area, visitors are welcomed by the Manor's mock-Tudor exterior and the antique beauty of its wooden interior. In the building's main hall there is a reception desk where visitors can obtain all necessary information or buy publications. Here, and in most other areas open to the public, shoes must be taken off before entering. This is a cultural custom which, in my experience, may not always serve hygienic purposes efficiently (e.g. toilet, dining room, outdoor tent).

After several weeks spent in Krishna communities, I now feel better accustomed to the cultural manifestations in the use of Sanskrit language, gender classification, and outward appearance. I have always felt comfortable among devotees, except for a few embarrassing moments when I could not remember their Sanskrit names. Once again, it is the relationship between genders that seem to be starkly out of place. The ratio between men and women is 3:2 among community members and 1:1 among wwoofer volunteers, while leaders and department representatives are predominantly male. Compared to Karuna Bhavan, women seem to interact with men more freely, although their organisational role to remain in background positions is still clearly obvious. Women behave extremely reservedly in the community, but men also cultivate a reserved attitude. A monk, one of the few who ever initiated a conversation with me as an outsider, explained the relationship between men and women as follows:

When we have classes in the temple room, ladies sit on the one side and men sit on the other side. Like that. [...] They don't mix together. If they are sitting next to you, you may start talking with them, you may develop a personal relationship. OK you may see them the other side of the room. [...] Especially if you are in the renounced order of life, those who are in the Ashram, the idea is: we don't

associate with the opposite sex. [...] If it's for service, for serving Krishna, then that's OK. (Interview 20: Appendix 1)

I told this kindly monk that I was just as attracted to women sitting afar off as when they sat next to me. But seeing, in his opinion, is different to talking, especially when issues outside the area of 'service' (helping each other) are touched upon. What I did not tell him was the level of attraction when full (white European) stomachs were exposed in the Indian style dress. This fashion may count as altogether normal in its original setting but not quite so in the west. Otherwise I have no reservations about the Hare Krishna apparel, though men sometimes seem to mismatch their dhoti (long dress) with their accompanied trainers, croc slippers or knee socks, creating an amusing collage of contrasted cultural items. Women and girls, on the other hand, generally look pretty and dignified in their colourful dress, unless socks and croc slippers cause disharmony.

The spacious parks, ornamental gardens, ponds, footpaths and educational trails provide an elevating atmosphere for community members and visitors alike, though paths for longer or medium walks are not available (Picture 41: Appendix 4). The lack of nature trails may partly be explained by the density of the location where neighbouring fields, settlements and busy roads prohibit free move. Cycling to the farm is made hard by busy traffic on the main roads leading to the farm's private country road. Cycling on the farm is virtually non-existent as there are no cycle routes and most members use the central space which is easily manageable on foot. I missed walking and cycling possibilities, especially to the farming and gardening area which seemed inaccessible.

The country road leading to the farm is often busy, providing opportunity to equally busy city-dwellers who come for work or retreat. The neatly kept parking lots, when all opened, can accommodate as many as one-hundred and seventy cars at a time.

Working units and departments

Eco-tourism, which is under the educational department, is the main attraction for outsiders. Coaches carrying school children, elderly and disabled people visit the farm to learn about Krishna spirituality connected with sustainable farming and lifestyle practices, and to taste the special vegetarian food. Most visitors are secondary school students who visit as in compliance with the national curriculum for religious studies.

A close spiritual connection to land and nature, including animals, is demonstrated by visiting the stops on the eco-tour. An entire bundle of practices is thus introduced from the growing of plants and specific herbs through ploughing and milking to food preparation and sharing Krishna prasadam. Besides their health benefits, some of the herbs – not unlike prasadam – are understood to have spiritual impacts on the consumer. Utilising these ailments is part of the path to spiritual perfection. Flowers are also grown for spiritual purposes and sacrificial sacraments. Ox-cart tours are offered two to four days a week to demonstrate the various aspects of eco-farming such as ploughing, rearing, milking, milling, and organic gardening.

I interviewed one of the tour guides, Alison, the only black person in the community (Interview 19: Appendix 1). I learnt that after visiting the centre, school teachers and students express their gratitude and appreciation on the community's website, where they can also pose questions. I observed a few student groups around the *goshala* (cowshed), which is the first stop of the bullock tour (Picture 40: Appendix 4). They

enjoyed feeding the cows, seeing them milked and listening to Alison's words about Hindu cow protection. Cow protection in the Manor has five basic requirements. 1. No cow or bull is ever slaughtered. 2. Calves suckle from their mothers. 3. Oxen are engaged in work. 4. Cows are hand milked. 5. Cows and bulls are fed appropriate, natural food. Cows in the stable are called by their first name. They have their name, photo and description displayed as follows: "Cintamini 27/11/2014 Breed: Dairy Shorthorn. One of her horns is much shorter than the other, and her stomach fur is an unusual red-white colour." (Picture 21: Appendix 4)

This is contrary to how cows are handled in factory farm settings, and even on most organic milk farms. To address this issue, inspired by the Manor, The Ahimsa Dairy Foundation offers ahimsa milk in North West London and parts of Hertfordshire. Plans are being made to distribute nationally in the future.

The ox-cart tour has several other stops where visitors learn about ploughing, farming and organic gardening. At the end of the tour, guides in the temple offer a spiritual journey into the faith, after which visitors taste Krishna food and dress in Krishna clothing. An estimated thirty to forty thousand pupils visit the centre every year. In addition to the secondary school students, there are university students, researchers, disabled groups and diverse groups of adult and elderly people who also visit the farm for its ecological and spiritual attractions.

Operating a primary school (over fifty children) and a nursery (seventeen children) also form part of the educational work. The programmes follow the British national curriculum. Teachers place primary focus on outdoor activities where students can learn about gardening, food, and cow protection in practice. The ethos of vegetarianism has a prominent role in the lessons.

Agriculture and Horticulture

In accordance with spiritual teachings, Krishna people live in close connection with cows, and extend a special ethic towards other animals, too. According to this ethic, animals are to be treated humanely and never slaughtered. Training oxen and putting them under yoke is not against the philosophy, as serving and exercise is deemed beneficial for humans and animals alike. The eco-farm uses oxen for ploughing, grinding grains and other farm-related activities. Fuel-based machinery in land cultivation is avoided altogether. The community's secretary explained in an e-mail (Interview 34: Appendix 2) that apart from serving environmental purposes, such as avoiding petrol, there are other reasons to reduce technology.

For example, the hooves of the cattle create many small holes in the soil, which is good for the soil and for fertility. Tractor tyres on the other hand tread the soil down and its harder for the water to seep in. The main thing is that we promote a simpler, a more traditional and natural way of life.

Vegetable gardens are cultivated for the community's own needs as well as for selling organic produce from a market stand during the summer season. Last year's harvest (2016) included the following: 8 tonnes of potatoes, 1000 kilos of spinach, 1 tonne of cabbage, 1500 bunch of coriander, 3 tonnes of pumpkins, 300 kilos of French beans, 700 kilos of courgette, 900 bunches of amaranth, 600 bunches of green amaranth, 200 kilos of marrows, 50 kilos of dhudi, 50 kilos of kohlrabi, 100 bunches of dill, 150 bunches of spearmint.

Growing is organic. Soil is enriched by communal compost, cow manure and plants. There are about twenty wwoofers working on the farm, who usually spend a few weeks or months in the community. In co-operation with a secular foundation, a

care farm initiative is maintained to give work to people with special needs or with a criminal record.

There are other departments in the community which are less related to ecological practice and more to direct worship. All activities in Krishna congregations are centred around the Temple service. Worship begins around 4 a.m., and a variety of spiritual programmes follow throughout the day, of which some are communal, some individual. Ornaments and specific plants are offered to deities, and several working units are responsible for the preparation of these and the smooth running of the rituals and services. A separate kitchen prepares special food called *maha prasadam* to be offered to semi gods. For the believer, every thought, saying and activity is subordinate to these spiritual practices and beliefs which form the foundations for a lifestyle characterised by contentment, simplicity, frugality and sharing.

I Am a Cook. Food Sharing Activities

Considering the detailed spirituality connected to Krishna food, kitchens constitute one of the most important units in Hare Krishna societies. This is particularly so in the Manor which serves as a base for food-sharing activities in London and other parts of the UK. While tasting Krishna food forms an inevitable part of the eco-programmes and most other outreach events, sharing it purposefully with the needy and in large quantities is one of the major activities here. To secure the flow of its food distribution schemes, the farm works together with famous supporters and celebrities like Paul McCartney, The Sex Pistols, Russell Brand, Boris Johnson, and others.

Organised from this centre, one thousand students and homeless people receive charitable food in London six days a week, a programme that has been running for over

ten years now (Pictures 30-37: Appendix 4). The idea of preventing foodstuff from becoming waste was first introduced by Parasuram das when he worked for a Hare Krishna restaurant in London 30 years ago. He did not like waste and decided to mix all leftover together (rice, lentils, salads and dressing) in one huge pot and distribute it to homeless people. He has remained in that service ever since. The activity today is organized by a social enterprise called Food for All. The director describes his hands-on approach to the work as follows:

It's only a small group of us. But small is good, because if you have got any money you can know exactly where it is, there is no office, the office is this in my bag here, you know there is no administrators, we all just work as a team and we all you know some of us cook, some of us serve, some of us fix the bicycles, some of us lend some little money if we need, you know I have my Rock 'n Roll friends they all chip in. At the moment, the only funding we get is my Rock 'n Roll friends and they help out. (Interview 15: Appendix 1)

Parasuram is not business-oriented, but when I ask if he would be willing to open a restaurant he does not say no. But he thinks of a 'different type' of restaurant, where people give donations instead of a fixed price and where food is 'my kind of food' – he says.

We collect it, and then we cook it and just give a donation. And actually I find it work better than you are charging people the menu you have to cook all different preparations. You cook one preparation we call it poor men's feast, it's it's kitchari we call it poor men's feast, fit for a king. And I entered this in a ... there is a television show, there is a competition and there is all the head chefs and it's a nationwide competition, and I've done pretty well in it. I didn't win but I got quite high and they came out to film here. They filmed the homeless people, this really helping people.... (ibid.)

The task of regular food sharing requires order and tight co-operation on the part of team members who start work at five o'clock in the morning and go on till the last dish is served early afternoon. Led by an interest of what it means to serve one thousand people, I joined the work for two days to familiarise myself with the daily routine of the group.

When I cooked in the kitchen, my primary interest was not centred on what it meant to chop up so many vegetables or stir the dahl in the gigantic pot used for large-volume preparations. What I mostly focused on was how it was possible to do this service incessantly for decades, and with as little fluctuation as Parasuram and the group experienced. Could I do the same? Would I not give up? What is the motivation that makes this activity running?

Parasuram is easy-going. When I ask if I can join his team, he agrees without showing emotions. Five o'clock in the morning – he adds. I know straight away that he would not be surprised if I never turned up. But I do turn up the next day. Still, he is not surprised. He is detached. He is natural. He is the leader who comes in to do his share of cooking. In contrast to Karuna Bhavan, here I faced no obstacles to entering the kitchen which needed regular workers and volunteers to secure the smooth running of the distribution scheme. The kitchen used for the purpose was not the same used for cooking for deities, though it was used for preparing community meals. Women and men alike could enter on prior agreement with the managers. The treatment of genders and food preparation is more flexible than in Karuna Bhavan.

The hot meal that will be distributed gets prepared each morning (except Sundays) starting at five o'clock by a few members, generally the same few workers. I soon notice that all these workers, at least the ones I work with today, have a Slavic background (Russia, Georgia, Croatia, Latvia). They speak Russian. There is only one woman among them, the rest of the team are male. I first suspect they are here to sustain their British residency for a while, but they soon turn out to be British citizens already who have been in the country for decades. I do not interrogate any further. Simply, they are Hare Krishna devotees who found meaningful employment within their spiritual community. Why are they not Britons, as is their leader, could be a question of other

investigations, but I am now here to cook. The woman gives me a plastic hat and an apron. There are displays of detailed hygienic instructions on the walls, but the level of cleanliness appears to be wanting. I need to keep one eye closed while cooking. I am not an inspector.

Ingredients and additional fruit and vegetables are provided by a local supermarket and other donors, and transported every morning by the director. We do not have a look at the expiry dates when we pack the car with prepacked items (Picture 36: Appendix 4). We look at the items themselves to judge if they are off or not. 'No waste' is one of Parasuram's phrases. The group is friendly and willing to utilise my help. Large tins of tomatoes get opened, bags after bags of lentils, chickpeas and other legumes get washed and placed in the huge pot to produce one big portion of mixed dahl. Music is on, but it is not the local radio. It is Hare Krishna mantras. Salt is added, but tasting is not allowed. Krishna will taste it first. It will be good as it is if it is cooked with Love & Devotion. The taste depends on the heart and attitude, not on outward excellence. A few hours go by and indeed the dahl smells very good. Parasuram himself adds the flavours and spices. I finish by placing the content into big plastic containers that are used to ship the food to its destinations. Someone else has been doing the rice. There is a large rice-maker for the purpose. As always, it is white rice. I have never seen brown rice in Krishna communities. I wonder what they get in rural India. Vegetables chopped, containers filled, van packed. Another group are ready to drive to London and carry on with the activity. It is well organised. It feels habitual. Van is gone. I can go to my room to rest.

Feeding 1000, London

Another day I decide to go to London with the serving group and experience some of their daily challenges. The university where we serve is closed to motor vehicles, so we pedal our way up to the site of distribution. We must load all the hot meal containers, puris, bread, fruit, vegetables and desserts onto the cargo bikes especially designed for the purpose. As the neighbourhood is hilly, it requires quite an effort to pedal the food and equipment up to the destination. Some of the food boxes fall off one of the tricycles. There is not enough space. The devotees decide to leave an empty basket behind on the roadside. We may or may not find it on our way back. The ride must be tiring uphill. I am giving supportive push to one of the riders by running next to his tricycle. Exhausted before even starting the actual serving, we quickly set up the scene as the queue is already meandering long on the street.

We serve university students, teachers, homeless people, and some workers who join the queue from companies and offices in the neighbourhood. Another part of the group separated from us earlier on to take a different route and serve only the homeless at an established point. Once all set, we start serving the rice, dahl, bread, yoghurt and a handout inviting people to a celebration held later the week at the nearby temple. The Croatian group leader is a fascinating person. He recommends Krishna food with moderate but steady enthusiasm. He handles wisely and patiently a mentally disturbed person who is trying to play havoc with our meal distribution. The man calms down. The devotee has been doing this work for years, and he appears to love serving. When it is my turn to take a meal, I sit on a bench next to a student who says she comes for the food every day as she wants to learn more about vegetarianism. It also helps her financially as she thinks it is hard to find reasonably priced vegetarian food in London.

In the summer, she will go wwoofing on a French eco-farm where she can continue her vegetarian journey. Among the students there queue up some lecturers, office clerks, by-passers and homeless-looking people. They all seem to enjoy Krishna hospitality and prasadam. There is a cheerful atmosphere. The sun is out, and we start packing and heading back to our van.

Donations for the work are received daily, sometimes through unexpected channels. The day I join the work we receive a phone-call on the way back to Watford. A company in London offers half a van of muesli which is to be collected today. Negotiations and transactions are made in quick succession. By the time the van arrives in Watford, unloaded and cleaned, the director must be present to begin preparations for tomorrow. Come what may, rain or sunshine, provisions must be made ahead as hundreds of people will be expecting another portion of hot meal, served with love and devotion.

But the intention, says the Food for All director,

is not to help people to buy a new car or a house. The campaign, as he calls it, is designed to lead people to acquire and cultivate a higher taste. It's not just we are feeding people so that they have enough money to buy a house, buy a car, but it's whether one can develop a spiritual identity. And all can actually do that. No matter what tradition they are in, they can be Christians or Muslims or Jews, they can develop a spiritual nature. Then they can be at peace with the world and the whole world would become a better place. (ibid.)

Besides waste prevention and the 'development of a spiritual identity', the sharing programmes also have a political economic aspect attached to them. As explained by Parasuram das, the scheme addresses issues of social inequality by mediating between rich and poor. 'Actually', he says,

we are a bit like Robin Hood because we steal from the rich and give it to the poor. You know, the rich guys are the supermarkets, you know, hoarding the stuff, let's liberate them from their goods and give it back to the poor. (ibid.)

The philosophy behind Parasuram's reasoning is more than just a general goodwill for social justice and the prevention of food waste. Simple living, animal compassion and connectivity with nature are central to what he advocates in everyday activities as well as food-related practices. Emanating from an 'alternative' way of living he first encountered on an Irish Hare Krishna farm, he sums up his experience as follows:

You know in my time in Ireland when I met the devotees I had never met a vegetarian. I thought that if I stopped eating meat I would probably die. So I was, I didn't know what to cook, there cooked beans and toast, the next day I cook peas and toast, the next day I cook beans on toast, and I was thinking I was going to die and realize gosh I am still alive. And then luckily I started to find out how to cook you know. When I joined the community, we were living on a farm, there was *no electricity*, there was *no telephone*, there was no... with wood burning stove and we were growing the vegetables on the land and we were living on the side of a mountain in a simple natural lifestyle. I saw that this is very good, very interesting, we don't have to hustle and bustle and rush into work from nine to five. There was an alternative you know. More *natural, simple lifestyle*, living in harmony with nature and that was appealing. And something a whole country could do like this. In harmony, *working on the land*, growing their own vegetables, you know. (ibid.)

This slow, simple and natural lifestyle in the Krishna teaching is also connected to ideas of sharing and service, which is reflected multiply in the community's endeavour to serve each other as well as outsiders. The suffix *das(a)* and *dasi* following the devotees' spiritual name means 'servant' or 'servant of God'. While personal enjoyment may have a place in the believer's life, it can never be the primary purpose of action and it cannot centre on the self. All things are to be arranged to please Krishna, and Krishna is pleased with loving service towards all living beings. This is the source of the believer's real enjoyment. To reach this, a so-called 'higher taste' must be cultivated so that the lower cravings do not gain victory over the high. Service is regarded an excellent way to 'restrict' oneself from 'sensual enjoyment' and 'pleasures'. In Parasuram's words:

So you can give up the lower taste for the higher taste. So everybody needs a higher taste, because you can give up something for a week, OK I am not gonna do that for a week, I am not gonna drink for a week, I am not gonna – but you must get a higher taste, otherwise you will actually slip down to the lower taste. [...] But the soul needs to be directed in the right direction because we got bewildered that is the whole thing we came to the material world and we got bewildered so desires are there. If you are an artist paint picture of Krishna, if you are a musician make music for Krishna, if you are a farmer grow stuff for Krishna, if you are a dressmaker make stuff for Krishna, you engage all your things in spiritual activities. If you are cook, cook for Krishna. We cook every day for Krishna and we feed a thousand people every day. (ibid.)

And cooking for Krishna can only mean vegetarian food, as that is what devotees say he likes, and what ISKCON organisationally promotes. One main reason for this is compassion towards all living beings. During my ad-hoc open-air interview with Parasuram, he pointed to three ducks which were flying in the air right above our head. A friend of his donated the ducks to him as his dogs started to trouble them during the mating season. He cherished his pets, gave them names, and now visited them at the Manor often asking Parasuram about how they were. Yet, says Parasuram, they are exactly the same species as he buys in the local supermarket disguised in a frozen, unrecognisable form.

Apart from its ethical and environmental benefits, the diet is proclaimed to be a healthier alternative to meat-based diets as, in Parasuram's words,

meat is responsible for so much cancer, colon cancer and so on, different cancers. So actually, doctors now recommend: eat healthy food. What does that mean? – Fruit and veg. Green vegetables, fruits. Five fruits a day. Five a day you know.

Parasuram and his fellow believers also argue for the health benefits of their diet by explaining the biological differences between the intestines of humans and carnivorous animals. Also, because of 'poisons' found in meat, one "is very likely to avoid cancers on a vegetarian diet".

When large-scale sharing programmes are in operation, they seem to attract celebrities, politicians, musicians, artists and affluent supporters. These connections are especially

visible at the Manor where other popular programmes are designed, such as the Feed the 5000 campaigns. The involvement of celebrities such as Paul McCartney, Russel Brand and politicians makes the social network of the farm wide and diverse. But the charity, according to its director, is not seeking financial help through fund-raising campaigns of any kind. Supporters get involved through word of mouth.

The Food for All director organised international programmes of sharing for example at the Notre Dame in France where civilians got involved in the chopping and preparation of the food, making the event a communal social activity. At the EU headquarters in Brussels, politicians joined to eat and listen to the talk given by Tristram Stuart who proposed policy changes to prevent supermarket food from becoming waste. The feeding programme in London is also planned to be extended to 5000 people. Parasuram said:

I want to expand this to 5000. And we are hoping that with the help of Russell Brand, the friend of ours, he is a famous comedian and actor, and possibly Paul McCartney, we can actually do that. If I had a van just full time collecting the food, I cook it all in the big pot, drive it in, and there is 20,000 students at UCL, University College London, and these students would be happy to get a hot meal. Because student fees now have gone up double and they are struggling and now it's becoming a thing like... even like... it's almost like rich people can only get education. (ibid.)

To continue, Parasuram das explains what 'real economics' and the philosophy behind these sharing programmes means to him:

Most of the supermarkets won't give away their stuff. They chuck it out. They think if we give away our stuff people will not buy our stuff. Because they are just thinking of money, of economics. But this kind of economics may appear to be proper, but actually *real economics is coming, for instance, nobody has ever gone poor by giving away*. You know you don't get poor, you will not become a poor man, by giving away things. You know that's not the law. You know there is laws of nature, the law of gravity, the law of action, reaction. These are, we won't be able to see it, but if you give away, you share and everything becomes balanced. So there is enough for everybody's need but not everybody's greed. So we have campaigns where we are going to France this month and we cook for 5000 people but we are cooking what's called ugly vegetables. Cosmetic reasons. The apple is too big or the apple is too small. The carrot is bent or funny shape,

the vegetable, the broccoli is too big you know, for cosmetic reasons, so all it is getting thrown away for cosmetic reason. We say, no, this is good fruit and veg, so we reuse it back to the community. So that's what this campaign is about so we do this in many countries from Ireland, usually we do about three or four a year in the UK, and then we do Brussels. (ibid.)

Parasuram mentions Christianity several times. When I ask him about the origin of the Feeding 5000 title, he explains that on his trip with devotees to Israel they met a solitary monk who offered them the choicest fruits that had fallen off his trees. The monk was supposedly living on a spot where Jesus fed the 5000, and in Parasuram's account his own waste prevention programme was thus 'divinely arranged' and 'probably named by Jesus Christ'. His attachment to Christianity may be explained by his Irish origin, which seems to echo the interesting cases of other Irish converts. Shaunaka Rishi Das, director of the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, is also an Irishman, a devotee who still regards himself a Christian of some kind. Influenced by the Hare Krishnas' practical manifestation of what he had been taught in Catholicism, he joined a community of devotees in Ireland to seek first-hand knowledge and experience of the lifestyle. All the seven novices who joined at the time are still good friends, and they are all of Christian origin. I carry this thought further in the next section centred on conversions.

From City-Accountant to Hare Krishna Monk

In the previous chapter I discussed Michael's story of becoming a vegetarian devotee from a dope-user and omnivorous hippy. In his account, compassion and Krishna prasadam were key in bringing about the change of identity in his life. I also illustrated how some others were attracted to the community through music, spiritual philosophy, free Krishna meals, gardening, or a combination of these. In this section I present the case of a monk (George, pseudonym) in Bhaktivedanta Manor, whose first spiritual

encounters were in the Christian Science Church. George, coming from an opulent professional background in accountancy, relates his story by consciously denoting its key events as special milestones to take him another step further to his Krishna belief. The key trigger for him was an underlying distaste for a money-making career in London and boring holidays on tropical beaches. He wanted something more meaningful and satisfying, which he eventually found in the Krishna community.

George was brought up in the Church of England but “it didn’t really do much for me” – he says (Interview 20: Appendix 1). When he lived in North Wales, an old woman in her nineties gave him a Christian Science book entitled *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. This book taught him much about how to live in simplicity and to abide by principles such as avoiding alcohol. He followed its teachings for about ten years in his twenties and early thirties, but ultimately he did not find it ‘particularly satisfying’ and got ‘disenchanted with it’. Then he thought he would try to be a ‘regular person’, doing what most people do, not following any religion, going to pubs, but that did not work for him, either. In his words:

I wasn’t particularly happy. I had a good job, I was an accountant in the city of London. So materially I didn’t have a problem. But I wasn’t satisfied, I wasn’t happy within. And at some point, I had very bad asthma when I was a child [...] and it came back again in my mid-30s, and I basically couldn’t walk down the street without taking two or three inhalers [...] and I read a book by Tony Robins [...] called *Unlimited power* and in that book, in the second chapter, he advocated becoming a vegetarian for different reasons: ethical reasons, health reasons, compassion reasons. Actually, my brother’d been a vegetarian all his adult life more or less. I actually wanted to be a vegetarian, and this sort of inspired me. Then we went on a very expensive holiday to Barbados, one year. I just found it so boring, there was nothing to do. [...] It was just like sitting by the pool in a hotel room, eating, just on the beach. When I got back to England I looked at the holiday photos and I looked really, I was overweight, I looked miserable, I’ve got to change something in my life. So I decided to become vegetarian, to exercise more and to lose weight by going to weight watchers. [...] And within six months

the asthma went completely, so I put it down to those three things: becoming a vegetarian, and losing weight and exercising. (ibid.)

As a next step, George joined an Ayurveda Massage and Meditation programme, where he found the philosophy somewhat loose when the organising woman told him about her affairs with a man outside her marriage. This did not appeal to him and raised doubts about the integrity of the programme. Very soon his fifteen-year-old son received a Hare Krishna handout about the ISKCON Temple in Soho. “For some reason, I was fascinated by this card and used it as a bookmark in all my books” – he said. Yet, being a ‘suit-and-tie-briefcase’ professional at the time, it took George six months to ‘pluck up the courage to go along’ to the place he had never heard of before.

There he took part in a remarkable lunch programme and a class:

The only thing I remember from it he said if you want to come to the human form of life you need to follow these four regulatory principles. No eating meat, fish or eggs. No illicit sex. No intoxication and no gambling. And I thought well, that’s amazing. Because you remember about that lady they treated this doctor as some kind of guru but I said they don’t really have much philosophy in it she said she is having an affair. [...] So I just thought well, they are just telling it as it is, you know they’ve got some real principles you know. And most people they are just interested in getting followers, getting money or something like that, but most people would run away as soon as they hear well what else is in life having sex and you know eating meat and stuff and bit of gambling what’s wrong with a bit of gambling. Most people would be put off, but they are not afraid to say it. They are not afraid to say: this is it, if you really want to make spiritual progress in life, you have to follow these principles. So that really inspired me. I thought that’s amazing. (ibid.)

After this occasion George obtained his own copy of the Bhagavad Gita and bought the necessary beads to practice Hare Krishna chanting. This part of the faith seemed a bit hard to understand, but on another holiday in Tenerife George was getting up early to read and chant and “it started ringing bells”. On his return to London, he took part in a Sunday programme at the Soho Temple, a memorable event he describes this way:

We sat in rows on the floor and the devotees were coming with buckets of prasadam and I was always very greedy. I am still greedy unfortunately but, so I was just accepting everything they were giving me and I was just eating it and I

can swear to you I became intoxicated. There was nothing intoxicating in it, except for the spiritual element of it. It was just like I floated home. My feet didn't touch the ground, and I was so excited. I got home and I said I just had the most amazing, wonderful feast, it was incredible. And my family just looked at me like I was crazy.

From this point in time nothing stopped George from getting regularly involved in ISKCON's community life. In summarising his account at the end of our conversation he recalls that his search and long spiritual journey started by feelings of a void and a lack of belonging. "I am an outsider. I don't really belong here. This is not my home." – he said. His aspirations "not just being a sense enjoyer" resonated with strict and direct Hare Krishna regulations which he found appealing. I asked him if he had a spiritual experience as a source of encouragement on his spiritual quest. One beautiful day, he answered, he walked through a Welsh valley and

I looked over the valley and suddenly, out of the blue, I suddenly ... what amazing thing, what amazing thing Jesus Christ did to sacrifice Himself. And I thought wow that's amazing, he just sacrificed Himself for others, for us. You know. That was a kind of opening for me. [...] That opened the way for the Christian Science. [...] Nothing happens by chance.

On a similar note, the director of the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies connects his spirituality to Christian influences. As in George's narrative, it was the high ethical standards manifested in practice that attracted him to the Krishna community. He conveyed it like this:

I was trying to figure out who do I practice my spirituality with? Who is practicing Christianity? A lot of people are Christian, but who is actually... What Christ talks about in the Bible is quite high. You know. He is setting the bar very high. I don't see, we are not acting like that. So how do you do that? And ironically when I visited the Temple for the first time I discerned that these people are practicing the Christianity. [...] I joined to become a Christian. I didn't join to become a Hare Krishna. [laughter]. I am open. I joined to become a Christian. So I've become a better Christian. I call myself a Hindu people call me Hindu [...] but I wear the term lightly. I wear the term Christian lightly, too. Because even Jesus wasn't a Christian. I am just trying to be a servant of God and learn how to serve God better. In every context. And be able to give something to other

people that is substantial and not about me. And that's the Christian message and that's the Vaishnava message. (Interview 21: Appendix 1)

As far as dietary practices are concerned, the director was already attracted to vegetarianism before he heard of the Hare Krishnas. "It already made sense but I didn't have an alternative" – he said. To find an alternative appears to have been a key point for most of the conversion narratives I recorded. Krishna food practices, especially eating, were instrumental in leading people to the Hare Krishnas in the United Kingdom. "It was the food that got me" – Michael summarised in *Karuna Bhavan*, and this was echoed in several cases in the Manor, too. However, food does not appear to be the sole contributor to a new identity. In this chapter I presented some findings that show that the journey to embrace the Hare Krishna faith is made up of several milestones, all leading to a collective identity that is ultimately vegetarian and eco-spiritual. In some cases, Christianity is referenced as an important and memorable milestone in the lives of the devotees. This shows that one's cultural heritage (e.g. Irish Catholicism) can become a means to build on in processes of incremental change. At the same time, to some, cultural heritage manifested by 'suit-and-tie-briefcase'-like solutions prove to be altogether unattractive. These very solutions, including 'sense enjoyment', holiday-making, material accumulation and other 'regularities' may cause 'disenchantment' and a search for a community of strict principles and high-level 'bars'. Inasmuch it is a search after high ethical standards, Hare Krishna identification may be understood as an escape from mainstream society where one 'does not belong'. Quite surprisingly, the Hungarian farm yields yet another, though not altogether different, type of converts and pattern of conversion, which I depict in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7. KRISHNA VALLEY, SOMOGYVAMOS, HUNGARY (CASE 3)

Introducing the Farm

Started in 1993 by a handful of devotees, the Krishna Valley has become a sizeable eco-village with 700 acres of land (Picture 3: Appendix 4). The valley is member of both international (GEN) and national (MEH) eco-village networks. It is regarded and often referenced by devotees in the UK as a successful and beautiful Hare Krishna centre. Interestingly, the fame was not specifically earned by its ecological achievements, but for the complimentary and reverent *murti* (deity) worship in its temple. Krishna ecology is subordinate to the spirituality which motivates all sustainable practices in the movement. Several of the interviewees in Britain had visited or were planning to visit the community for further training or retreat. As early as the 1980s, Sankirtan workers (street canvassers) in Karuna Bhavan were raising funds for the Hungarian farm, which now operates fully for the enjoyment of members and outsiders alike. Since then, the valley has had to raise its own resources for maintenance and development.

Space and time in the Krishna Valley are arranged similarly to the British farms of Karuna Bhavan and Bhaktivedanta Manor, with a high number of outdoor sanctuaries for solitary meditation or chanting. There are fourteen major shrines (pavilion and garden), twenty minor ones (with small architecture), and another twenty surrounded by trees, plants and ponds. The village-like atmosphere of the Valley adds to the spatial spirituality by reinforcing unity and a sense of belonging, and by delimiting the type of performable practices. Shops, family homes, devotees walking, chanting or talking

across the landscape, all remind believers of their shared goal to please Krishna by self-forgetting service.

It has always been ISKCON's intention to establish autonomous farm communities to learn and to teach the Hare Krishna lifestyle motto of simple living and high thinking. However, though creating eco-communities may be appealing to ISKCON's members all over the world, not every country with Hare Krishna presence has managed to achieve this goal. I was informed (e.g. Interview 26: Appendix 1) that the survival of the valley largely results from a strong economic system that regulates life across the forty working units and nine departments inside the valley. These departments buy and sell between each other using a local money scheme which I introduce later. One manager explained that this is a well-established socio-economic system which has been improving for the last twenty years.

I do not remember that we ever had a halt in sustaining ourselves. When we had shortage of crop production, we purchased some food. But we would rather have surrendered our desire to develop housing for example, or the kitchen, than make extra investments. The big advantage of a community like this is that the individual is not so vulnerable. Individuals protect the community and are protected by it. (Interview 24: Appendix 1)

The valley forms part of the medieval village of Somogyvamos which has a population of about six-hundred people, one-hundred and twenty of whom are gypsies who are mostly unemployed, and two-hundred and twenty Krishna believers. Some of the Hare Krishna believers established home within the valley (the eco-farm itself), while others live in the village next to the farm. Their unique Gandhi-like, white-robed figures – walking or cycling – give a striking character to the landscape. Wherever they appear, even next to the local pub, they would greet everybody by 'Haribol' (Chant the holy names of God) or 'Hare Krishna', which seems to be maintained as an unspoken rule and sign of loyalty to the faith and Krishna. This bias towards Indian customs, of which

greeting is just one example, may be appealing to some outsiders while off-putting to others.

The community inside the valley consist of one-hundred and thirteen volunteers (of which twenty-nine are children), and fifteen missionaries. Missionaries are fully committed celibate monks or nuns (Brachmanas), while adult volunteers are permitted to live in matrimony and pursue professions other than priesthood. Both missionaries and volunteers need to obey strict community rules. No cars or televisions are owned by the households. Sexual life is regulated in accordance with organisational principles and faith. Marriages and childbirth may be arranged and supervised by leaders and the Vedic horoscope. Outside the valley, in the village of Somogyvamos, there live eighty-five followers, of whom twenty-five are children. Most of them work in the valley, but some simply stay in its close vicinity to enjoy the spirituality and tranquillity of the place. There are a few elderly British believers who have retired in the village, and a few young devotees from the UK and Russia who live inside the valley, but most members of the community are native Hungarian. The ratio of men and women is almost equal, but there are hardly any women in managerial positions. One quarter of the devotees have university degrees, mostly in ecological science or economics. The age span of the inhabitants shows an interesting peak among those between forty and fifty years of age. Ages are distributed as follows:

Over 60	Between 50-60	Between 40-50	Between 30-40	Between 20-30	Between 10-20	Under 10
3	8	45 (!)	29	13	6	24

This demographic shift requires explanation. At the collapse of communism (1989) there was an increasing interest in spiritual matters among Hungarians, especially young people between fifteen and twenty-five years of age. Practically all the interviewees belong to that age group (now between forty and fifty). These devotees met and joined the community by following a similar social pattern. Some of them clearly referred to the end of communism as a period when churches opened their gates and reached out to those searching for something different in terms of spiritual alternatives. It was also a time, according to the leader of the ox workers for example (Interview 28: Appendix 1), when many turned toward vegetarianism among various lifestyle options and spiritual teachings. I later return to the theme of conversion and identification in more detail, now only to consider its demographic consequence for the valley. Some interviewees reported that a lack of young newcomers and a high number of householder members in their mid-forties results in a situation where a certain level of exhaustion and languidness infiltrates the community. The reason for lack of newcomers may be diverse, one perhaps being a lack of sankirtan workers who may now be raising children. Previously, during the 1980s and 90s, young people became attracted to philosophical alternatives such as the Bhagavad Gita, a reading of which led hundreds of Hungarian young people to the movement. Nowadays, vegetarianism and yoga practice appear to be inviting to a segment of society, but these may not result in the membership commitment characterising previous decades. Practically this means an acknowledged lack of necessary workers as well as a fresh drive to take sustainability to the next level. The community monitors itself in terms of economic, ecological and social sustainability, of which they regard the latter to be the most challenging in developing and maintaining an eco-community. The community's ecological NGO (Eco-Valley Foundation: see more details later) recently published

three books which deal with these topics respectively. Workers openly shared with me their insights, struggles and dilemmas concerning community building.

The departments of Krishna Valley are organised around three major activities: Religion, Tourism and Agriculture. Main departments such as Temple Worship, Education, Cooking, Eco-Tourism, Cow Protection are further divided into working units. Agriculture for example has several units from gardening to fruit preservation and a sales branch. In this chapter I describe practices and phenomena that may cut across several organisational unit at once, often irrespective of which department or unit they belong to.

Impressions

Arriving on the farm I was impressed by its spacious yet orderly landscape, a bicycle rental scheme, the neat parking lots, the many trees and ornamental plants, and an appealing natural setting. The long road leading up to the temple has been constructed from paving-blocks, which lends a natural character to the path (Picture 45: Appendix 4). This is reinforced by the devotees walking or cycling up and down the road wearing their *dhotis* (for men) and *saris* (for women), or other Indian clothes. This kind of ‘dress code’ does not disturb me. What may be problematic is that the Indian dress seems mandatory in the community. It may only be an unwritten rule, but as one interviewee put it: “We would be very surprised to see a devotee in trousers. We would not say anything, but we would be surprised.” (Interview 26: Appendix 1).

The level of fascination with Indian cultures is striking. People are called by Sanskrit names which they cherish as a spiritual name given by their spiritual master at their initiation ceremony. Often these names are hard to remember. I use my mobile phone

application to memorise the names right before appointments. In the Krishna Valley, it is customary to add *Prabhu* (master) to men's and *Mataji* (mother) to women's names. Politeness required by the Vaisnava tradition (which Hare Krishnas follow) is expressed through this. When reference is made to one's own self, the words *Das*, *Dasi* or *Dasa* follow the name, meaning 'servant'. Men and women do not address each other informally, but in a distant courteous way which in Hungarian grammar is used between strangers or people whose age widely differ. This may sound unnatural to outsiders and may distance them from the community.

Devotees wear a clay mark on their forehead, believing that it is from the banks of the sacred river Ganges and that it is for beautifying the body, which Krishna likes. Although I heard different explanations elsewhere (the clay is from the Bengali region where Krishna tradition takes its origin), this custom is perfectly agreeable. What is disturbing is a tangible sense of classification among the devotees. Maharajas and spiritual masters are highly esteemed if not idolised. Obedience to them is a due. They give the spiritual name to novices at initiation, and mark out the path of service to be followed. Following a 'nonpolluted' caste system, scriptural explanations are given about ranking people into categories, for example management, spiritual leadership, and trade. There is a sense of 'othering' in the community. They, the women, and us, the men. Unclean outsiders and 'Puja pure' kitchen workers who are entitled to cook for deities and religious feasts; believers and non-believers who are called '*karmies*'; initiated and non-initiated, and so forth. On the first day of my work in the kitchen some gypsy women were hired from the local village as a special feast required additional working hands. The women worked outside, while we were working inside, watching them through the windows. Being a vegetarian, I was considered to be 'clean' for the work. On entering the kitchen to hand over the chopped vegetables, one woman

dropped a food item on the floor. Embarrassed, she quickly lifted it up exclaiming: ‘it has not touched my foot, I am aware of the rules’.

As my focus is on food-related practices, in what follows I describe how I experienced Krishna food in the community. Every mealtime food was carried outdoors or into a large tent. Members and potential visitors queued up for food, most of them carrying their own plates. Visitors received wooden spoons and biodegradable plates for a set price. My outsider status was obvious by the clothes I was wearing. With usually no other outsider around, I was the odd one out within the community. Generally, nobody would talk to me during the line-up, not even those I had met and befriended before. The Krishna community show much reserve and a lack of curiosity. It may be another unspoken rule, perhaps an outcome of the teachings on ‘detachment’. Members seem to focus on their individual development and not interfere with the lives of others. Some are reluctant even to say a word of greeting. Often their beads hang on their hand, and chanting at times may even take place in public spaces such as the dining room. Nevertheless, when it was my turn to be served, I always received a loud ‘Hare Krishna’ and generous service. Generally several devotees, mostly men, do the serving. Before receiving my plate, I had to pay cash in return for my meal, which felt a bit awkward as I was the only one to do that in the queue. I was different, the one who did not belong. I would have preferred to buy vouchers in the local shop, or pay a lump sum to pre-book a set number of meals, but the use of cash felt a bit unnatural in an otherwise natural setting. When I fancied more food and asked for bigger portions, it was never a problem to serve me generously. Sometimes *maha prasadam* was offered in tiny quantities. Maha prasadam is a special food item (normally a cooked sweet) that is offered to murtis (semigods), of which there are manifold varieties in the worldwide Krishna community. Devotees are especially delighted to receive maha prasadam.

Sometimes it is brought onto the serving table later than the main food items, and at such times devotees queue again in excitement to get a share of the blissful treat. In temple societies maha prasadam is distributed among the guests as an act of service. It is prepared with meticulous care to ensure sacramental purity, and it tastes better according to believers. It is regarded – as well as the chanting of his name – nondifferent from Krishna, and a means to perfecting character.

When people receive their food, they sit down on the floor or elsewhere, sometimes on the lawn or on a bench. In that latter case, several devotees choose to sit aside somewhere, away from the rest, sometimes turning their back on the community. This time may be used as preparation for chanting or just meditation and contemplation. When staying indoors, women, children and men sit apart (Picture 53: Appendix 4). It is rare to see men and women sit and eat together, unless they are family members. Once served, I usually sit and wait, but when nothing happens – which is normally the case – I start conversing to the person nearest to me. They usually respond, but at times remain reserved, which I then politely accept.

Ritual purity is required when someone is serving food. At times, and this holds for all three communities I visited, I did not dare to request a second helping as it seemed unclear whether it was right to do so. Once I was trying to risk it but was immediately told not to proceed as there was no ‘clean’ person around, although a variety of food was still resting on the table. I took the situation easy but wondered why newcomers were not introduced into customary rules to prevent embarrassment and misunderstanding. Krishna food sometimes appeared to be marking out boundaries of exclusivity while in theory trying to include all people.

I find Krishna food delicious. It is talked about in Krishna communities in such superlatives that it is hard to question its convivial impact on outsiders. Yet clearly, the conviviality of eating together fell short of what I had expected. When it is served on the street or in public places, which I also experienced, the spirit and atmosphere feels to be more uplifting than in its 'religious', official setting. Even in the valley, I had a chance to eat pizza together with devotees who were making it in an outdoor oven built next to the cowshed. The pizza was delicious (no Indian ingredients for a change) and the level of conviviality was high, though again, not one woman was present in the group. But in its religious setting, in my experience, it would be more appropriate to talk about commensality rather than conviviality when eating together (with outsiders) is described. Notwithstanding, the qualities of this commensality (slow, peaceful, vegetarian) are more encouraging for sustainable behaviour than those offered by the fast-food dietary culture in the outside world.

In terms of sustainable practices non-relating to food, I found the farm and the community exemplary in what devotees have practically achieved. The tangible results in re-introducing biodiversity and in the cow-protection programme impressed me the most. Following simplicity by not owning cars (only sharing those that belong to the organisation) and televisions are noteworthy aspects in the community. Also noteworthy is the devotees' endeavour for practical engagement with the land and other meaningful employment. Children of the community are educated in the accredited primary school where focus is on spiritual and practical training based on involvement. Students are considered as the next generation of devotees to represent Hare Krishna practices to the secular world. Simplicity cuts across every phase of the education system followed. Simple living appears to be a dominant project in the community. Devotees foster a genuine and modest attitude in talking about environmental success

and limitations. In the following sections I describe these achievements and limitations in detail.

As described in preceding chapters, food in Krishna communities revolves around a bundle of activities, not just eating. Apart from regular spiritual teachings and the reading of scriptures and commentaries, members connect to several points of the food cycle by either labouring in some of the corresponding departments, or appreciating its visible manifestations hour by hour. Children in the primary schools are trained to understand and appreciate the whole cycle in theory and practice alike. Adults talk about it frequently and in spiritual admiration. When sequences of food practices are – often supported by spatial and temporal arrangements – linked into bundles on Krishna eco-farms, they condition each other and provide security for their survival, as links between them make connections stronger and more durable.

Spatial arrangements

Practices everywhere are confined to spatial dimensions, and it is especially so on Hare Krishna farms, given their very specific, spiritual arrangements. Staying far from the urban hustle and bustle, in the midst of undulating hills, gardens, parks and like-minded people, always already carries with it specific possibilities and impossibilities for doing. For example, the absence of shops makes it virtually impossible for one to become a habitual buyer or a conventional consumer. Even if there was an urge, it would be controlled by the lack of opportunities, hence shopping, for one thing, cannot become an everyday activity for farm dwellers. Likewise, as there is no television, wanting to watch it would not be a straightforward project for community members. It is prohibited. Hence, much of the advertising campaigns and materiality of the outside

world is scarcely if at all present on Hare Krishna farms. Television was often referenced in the Hungarian community as a symbol of this-worldliness that controls the lives of multitudes entangled in its snare, causing serious problems in society. I did not see tablets and laptops in the hands of community members or communal spaces, and mobile phones in public were used for oral communication or making online inquiries. Cars were shared by community members living on the farms, and ownership was restricted to work and mission activities.

But it is not merely the lack of objects that prevents certain practices and creates time and space for others. The affect generating role of spatial atmospheres has been conceptualised by Reckwitz (2017: 123) in a recent volume on *The Nexus of Practices* (Hui, Schatzki and Shove, 2017). Frequently, these spaces are designed or “used expressly for their function as affect generators”. Individual items in such atmospheres would become less important as isolated entities, but they find meaning through their interrelations in their symbolic environment. “People are affected by atmospheres arising from the sets of relations of artefacts, as well as from other people, groups or practices” (ibid.), and I would add: plants and animals. Space on Krishna farms provides specific geographies, materials and even thoughts that delimit the number and nature of performable practices, and turn the environment into a conducive location for a range of more sustainable practices. This spatial arrangement is most inviting and favourable for gardening, appreciating nature, outdoor exercise, eating together, cultivating friendships, reading and communal activities. It was ISKCON’s founder’s legacy to create farming communities to cultivate ‘simple living and high thinking’, and to demonstrate this philosophy in practice to the outside world. As such, to ‘live off the land’ and ‘off the cows’, and in harmony with nature – on the basis of serving rather than exploitation – is of paramount value for the believer. There is a spiritual

calling to create these spatial conditions purposefully, so that all worldly ('lower') passions that centre on the self can be stifled and directed toward 'the higher taste'.

The architectural design in each farm community I visited centres around the Temple, which is built in the middle of the space, with all other facilities subordinate to its central, spiritual position. In Hungary, two monumental elephants welcome visitors at the entrance gate, inducing feelings of awe and admiration (Picture 45: Appendix 4). There are more than fifty religious shrines situated around the valley, creating feelings of peacefulness and devotion. Colourful deities, semi-gods, glittering altars, ornaments, cows, flowers are placed in space to guide spiritual behaviour and uplift the soul. Hare Krishna dress, beads, painted faces and hairstyles stand in constant reminder of the philosophy to follow. Even in the cowshed, statues, pictures and quotations proclaim the words of the founder or other Hindu messages. Pictures and statues of Srila Prabhupada are recurring everywhere. There is no alternative to the collective spiritual identity which is interpreted by devotees to be the glue to hold sustainable communities together.

Regarding sustainability, selective waste collection, alternative energy, water management, food, land use, eco-tours, reading groups, cow protection are all spatially set to stabilise pro-environmental attitudes and practices. Demand-side resource reduction is key in domestic practices, especially in the Krishna Valley where external electricity is ruled out of the space. Devotees juxtapose simplicity to materialist greed, or associate it with health (e.g. simple food, cold water shower), contentment, or a less carbon-intensive life-style. Simplicity and frugality are significant traits that cut across several practices of community life on the Krishna farms. Traditional farming methods are used despite the fact that they are economically less productive. The reason given for avoiding machinery is to maintain ethical standards and a close relationship with

land, cows and oxen, and to find 'meaningful employment' for more people and for male cattle that are neither slaughtered nor kept alive for sale as meat. Technological innovation in a sense is heading backwards to traditional ways of protection, care and cultivation, while also advancing towards modern alternative energy sources (e.g. wind turbines).

In Krishna Valley, personal boreholes and compost toilets are being introduced at the expense of the more comfortable but complicated use of centralised water supply and sewage management system. Labour, domestic or not, is purposefully made manual where machinery is avoidable. Drawing water from the well, doing the laundry or milking the cow are all done by hand. Life thus becomes slow and simple on all farms. The Hare Krishnas have no this-worldly ambitions to pursue. Simplicity is made a source of aesthetic enjoyment inasmuch as it is more natural, more traditional and more fitting into ancient Indian practices which are regarded by members as culturally supreme. But it is also promoted for a practical reason: to avoid the temptation of comfort which material artefacts may stimulate where they are present.

Indeed, distracting elements fight for supremacy and compete for attention in the form of tractors, for example. In the Krishna Valley, where there is a tenfold surplus in a variety of grains, the surplus is produced by tractor-dependent methods. It appears that the availability of machinery largely determines agricultural and domestic practices. Wherever they are purchased, they will be put into use. Thus, it seems that avoiding compromise is not only a question of ideas and ideals, but the material potentials and arrangements of one's livelihood. Although tractors are not necessary elements of the spatial atmosphere, the very possibility of their availability occasionally welcomes them to the field. The Hungarian devotees are aware of this conundrum, hence

connecting to the national electricity grid has been ruled out altogether. On similar grounds, they ruled out horses, while tractors have remained staunch competitors.

De-technologising endeavours on Hare Krishna farms are more in line with a literature urging emissions and demand reductions than with an ethos of technological innovation. Innovation here stands for experimenting with traditional and natural cultivating methods which result in nutritious produce even if quantity, investment and time are compromised. This provides an interesting case for Sustainability Transitions scholars, a perspective which draws attention to efficient emissions reductions primarily through lifestyle-related factors, de-technologising, and re-inventing traditions, which are less considered in the literature. While Sustainability Transitions scholars tend to focus on technological innovation, the Hare Krishnas promote and experience a considerably less CO₂-intensive lifestyle which can only be understood by investigating its motivational, spiritual factors (rules/beliefs). The underlying innovation in the researched communities is to create a (spiritually infused material) surrounding and architecture which is encouraging for sustainable practices while discouraging for others.

Ecological Achievements and Daily Management

Housing, Energy and Water

Despite the current lack in workforce and a younger generation, what the community has ecologically achieved to date is exemplary in more than one way. As far as water, gas and electricity are concerned, the community opted to be entirely off the national grid, though connection could be easily established. There are some exceptions though.

Piped water is used for watering some of the gardens, and at some working units natural gas is installed and generators are used for building works.

Simplicity and simplification is key when plans to improve sustainability on the farm are expressed. There is a modest attitude about achievements. It is often noted how seemingly good solutions could become eco-friendlier through further simplifications. The common vision of members is not to implement more sophisticated technology, but rather to reduce lifestyle demands. As one of the members expressed in an email interview: “Alternative energy is a mammoth theme. We have many schemes at hand, but always find ourselves voting for moderation, the radical reduction of energy use.”

(Interview 32: Appendix 1)

A durable GRUNDFOS solar pump supplies water centrally from a deep well. The leaders wish to decentralise this supply and return to traditional wells at each house, so that water can be drawn mechanically, individually and securely (without the use of technology), and sewage can be used and turned into compost on site, by the use of Swedish toilets and more sustainable (non-flush) methods. At present gravity takes grey water down to a valley where it is filtered and purified through a reed bed and used for irrigation. The system is demonstrated during the eco-tour as a sustainable alternative for water management, but plans are being made to simplify this further. Though the pump is solar, chances of failure are higher and the length of the pipes require chlorine to be added to water to prevent system decay. Thus, even the solar pump is considered to be an item of ‘technology’ and an obstacle in the way of simple sustainability. One interviewee (Interview 28: Appendix 1), whose house is already off this network, told me that the change caused a few sorrowful months to his wife, but after a while she began to appreciate the simpler method of manually drawing water from the well and the resulting autonomy.

Houses have some solar or wind devices to provide some power, but washing for instance is done by hand and other manual methods. Oil is used for lighting. Simplicity of lifestyle is advocated not only for its benefits for the practitioners, but because unregulated comfort is seen as a potential temptation. “If you have electricity” – said one of the secretaries – “you will develop technology that depends on electricity. If you have oxen, you will develop technology that depends on oxen.” (Interview 25: Appendix 1). Or as the manager of the ox work department put it: “if you want to start conservation farming, first you will need to sell your plough.” (Interview 28: Appendix 1). Demonstrating awareness of the power of comfort and habits, members of Krishna Valley avoid temptations by reducing the use of fossil-based energy to an absolute minimum.

Heating and warm water are provided by log burners. Devotees use traditional Hungarian tile stoves for heating, which keep warmth for several hours after feeding, but still fall behind the efficiency of more contemporary solutions, although special Finnish stoves are being tested in some of the houses. The quantity of wood usage equals that of the average Hungarian household (five-eight cubic metres a year), and as such the buildings themselves do not show any special innovation as far as emission rates are concerned. When the buildings were constructed some twenty years ago, managers paid attention to the use of local materials (bio-housing) rather than high efficiency (eco-housing). They built some hay-bale houses experimentally, but due to a lack of financial resources no expert services were consulted. Consequently, these buildings are reported to be problematic and unsuccessful (e.g. rodents nesting inside). There is some openness and interest on the part of young devotees to build passive or autonomous houses in the future, but the overall motivation seems sluggish and lacks enthusiasm. There are also plans to substitute log burners with solar collectors for hot

water supply. At present, wood burning is regarded as a sustainable solution on basis of its renewable nature.

Biodiversity and Trees

During the twenty-four years of its existence, community members have planted 350,000 trees on the farm, roughly an average of two-hundred trees per person each year. More trees are left in place then felled, resulting in a designed regeneration of biodiversity on the land. Shifting from previous monocultural cultivations and reforestation resulted in the re-introduction of several species in the area, a project that has been highly successful. The outcome is a shield of Hungarian-specific trees such as Turkey oak, hornbeam, stemless oak, linden, sycamore, and maple. Groups of diversely mixed trees provide a micro-climate and protection from winds, compost, food, natural insecticides, herbs, mushrooms and a rich habitat for biodiversity which has been recorded and monitored by the community in detail. The established monoculture was completely changed into woodlands and small-scale and organic production. Biodiversity has greatly improved through polycultural methods and arrangements. Contaminated water from chemical fertilizers in the wells are now clearing up completely. Many species of flora and fauna found habitat in the region, which is well documented in dissertations as well as community records which were made available to me.

Agroforestry is practiced according to traditional Hungarian methods of planting indigenous fruit trees at the edge of woodlands and leaving them largely unattended. The aim is to secure as many indigenous species as possible while also experimenting with some foreign or new species as a strategy for climate change adaptation. Some

two-hundred and fifty fruit trees have been planted in natural habitats such as woodland edges, and there are an additional one thousand trees cultivated more or less extensively (occasional pruning only) in two mixed orchards. Data recorded a few years ago list the following fruit trees that have been planted: apple (134), pear (30), Morello cherry (6), cherry (11), apricot (7), nectarine (5), plum (12), quince (4), medlar (3), grapes (15), berries (15) (red currant, black currant, raspberry, gooseberry, currant gooseberry, red oleaster, choke-berry, rowan, etc.), nuts: almonds (4), hazelnut (5), walnut (6), chestnut (6), nonindigenous: fig (6), pomegranate (5), kiwi (6), goiberry, jujube, Sharon fruit.

Notwithstanding the positive changes, there are compromises, some of which are explained by financial or practical reasons. One example is the case of the invasive acacia tree. In theory, managers would like to replace them all, but they yield good honey and firewood. Thus, and because of their speedy growth, they are planted and cultivated in certain parts of the valley. This is not the optimal solution for long-term biodiversity and for the development of local, indigenous species. If it was not for heating, there would be no need for this invasive species.

Cereal Cultivation

Monoculture is seen by the community as a destructive and avoidable agricultural method. One major ecological goal of the community was to re-introduce biodiversity through polycultural diversification and small-scale crop cultivation. One of the eco-tour stops display an air-shot photograph of what the flat monocrop surrounding landscape looks like and how the patchwork valley is nested in it, showing an altogether

different picture. The harmful outcomes of the green revolution and the advantages of polycultural methods are explained to the visitors at this site.

In order to secure crop variety, members grow several types of cereal grains (spelt, millet, buckwheat, legumes, amaranth) and produce ten times more than what the community consumes. As a general principle in food production, the focus is on prevention rather than treatment. Workers enrich the soil through rotational and fallow schemes, manure application and postharvest field management through the cultivation of plants in optimal rotation, ox (and tractor) work and manure. Community knowledge is accumulated and experiments are ongoing in this area. In collaboration with a nearby university, farm managers have carried out research projects spanning through five subsequent years in the past decade to compare differences between tractor-based cultivation and ox-based methods. Their findings show that while the former proves more efficient, the latter can also bring good results. It is recommended to plough once every few years by double or triple pairs of oxen (four or six animals) to make deeper burrows and thus prevent the hardening of a flat layer if the same depth is reached year after year. However, extensive and conservation farming is now becoming a point of interest in the community. Leaders of the agricultural department are studying the potentials of plough-free cultivation to apply as little human intervention as possible. According to the plans, special ox-pulled machinery would be used for planting seeds without having to turn the soil. As an ongoing programme, several kinds of machinery are being re-invented to carry out specific tasks by oxen. At present, however, fuel-based and animal-based machinery are both used on the community's cereal fields. Out of the twenty-five acres of cereal production only five are managed entirely by oxen, the rest of the land is mostly cultivated by tractors. Devotees sell this produce to the Krishna communities across the country, while the former is used by the valley itself.

This process seems to work against endeavours to exile technology from production as far as possible.

Vegetable Gardens

Around the valley, there are several vegetable plots and green-houses. Growing is managed through organic methods, although they are not controlled or certified. Even the school children have their own plots, and they follow the cycle of food from sowing to cooking and sharing. Drip irrigation is used wherever possible for best yields, but it requires connection to the national water supply. Nettle and comfrey extracts as well as companion planting protect plants from diseases by boosting their immunity. Plants are placed together in small mixed beds to secure diversity and prevent diseases. Seedbanks are developed of old traditional Hungarian plants and grains for exchange and reuse. Manure and compost enrich the soil. The composting of food-waste, reusable plates and cutlery is well organised across the valley. Permaculture and other experimental methods are only lightly considered, although the leader of the department takes part in national conferences on innovative solutions. Surplus is sold or preserved for the community's use during the unproductive months. According to the interviewees, nothing is purposefully planned for market activity, otherwise, it is feared, business aspects could take control over principles.

There is also a processing unit which preserves produce in jars without the use of additives. Unused garden products are preserved for the winter months. The work of this unit is somewhat misleading though, as it sells products, with ingredients from outside, under the name of 'Krishna Valley'.

A professionally built, spacious cellar keeps optimum temperatures for storing pumpkins and other vegetables and fruits. There is acquired knowledge about how to store specific varieties in separate sections to prevent decay. Pumpkins can last until April, leaving the community without local vegetables until the first greens appear in May. There is daily communication between the garden leader and the kitchens, where menus are planned to match weekly and daily availability. Menus in the kitchens are prepared in liaison with the gardening department. Everything has a financial value and payment is managed through filing records in books. If there is profit in any departments, they can invest it back into their own activities. Investments that are made for the interest of the whole community are financed centrally. In the gardening unit workers are hired from the nearby village, but the previously run woofers scheme has been discontinued as it was deemed unproductive.

Popularity

I befriended some of the male farm workers hired from surrounding villages. They generally expressed satisfaction and gratefulness to have found employment on the Krishna farm. The village people in the pub and elsewhere reported that occasionally sweets or whole dishes were shared with the villagers when devotees visited each household systematically. There is also a weekly (each Wednesday) food distribution programme in a nearby town, but it was not running during my stay on the farm. All people I asked in the village knew about the valley and the Hare Krishna farm. In about a twenty-mile radius the valley is signposted on the roadsides, and most people were aware of its existence. During the annual village fair – or rather, Valley Fair (each July) – all accommodation in the region is booked up in advance to host some seven-thousand visitors. Across Hungary most people seem to have heard about Krishna

Valley, their ecological endeavours and vegetarianism. About half of my recently asked acquaintances have already visited or were planning to visit the farm for its eco attractions. These attractions include a guided tour of six stops where visitors learn about natural grey water filtering and reuse, wind and solar systems, Hare Krishna schooling, organic production, Krishna food and cow protection (Picture 47: Appendix 4). Some forty-thousand people book the tour annually. During my stay, most visitors were elderly Hungarian women, whose trip were sometimes subsidised by local governments. Guides are available in Hungarian and German languages. By observing and talking to visitors I found them to be thrilled about tasting prasadam and having a ride on the ox-pulled cart (Pictures 49-51: Appendix 4). The two-hour trip may not lead to a direct life-changing experience for many, but ecological knowledge and experience may contribute to incremental changes in lifestyle practices. The income raised through the eco-programme contributes toward the valley's maintenance.

Finances

The community's departments and units must raise their own resources by functioning as business units. Except for the Temple and some other departments where metrics would be hard to use (decorations for worship, maintenance, etc.), financial viability is an expectation. There are sales transactions between departments, although real cash does not get exchanged. This contributes to transparency and order. Apparently, there is no confusion between the various working units. Everybody seems to know their responsibilities and tasks. Valley dwellers get some allowance for food and the bare necessities, for which real money as well as the community's local currency is used. There is no salary except for the living allowance. Everybody gets the same amount, the spiritual teacher and the cowherd alike. The local currency (called *Shyam*, another

name for Krishna) was introduced seventeen years ago, with a gradual increase in its proportion to what is paid in Hungarian currency. It is reported by the scheme's inventor (Interview 26: Appendix 1) that since local shops in the valley made spending easier, devotees widely accepted and understood the purpose of local money which is to spend earnings within the community and generate work and more independence through it. Those workers living outside the valley get a taxed salary by conforming to Hungarian employment rules.

According to the managers I interviewed, there is no intention of carrying out business activities beyond what is necessary to support the community. However, business enterprises do operate outside the farming community (e.g. a Hotel and Resort Centre), and they support the farm, the temple and the national Krishna organisation by their donations. The valley supports itself financially by selling the surplus cereal and vegetables as well as items such as Indian clothes and flowers. But the main source of income is the eco-tourism scheme. Buses of visitors arrive daily to learn about the lifestyle and sustainability. A daily fee is charged for the services, which is about £10 including the ox-cart ride and lunch.

Cow Protection in Action

I Am a Milker

During my stay in the Krishna Valley I visited the cowshed several times. A well-kept dirt road, on which workers walk or cycle back and forth, leads directly into the impressive and inviting building. All visitors are welcome to cross through the large

wooden gate and step into what feels like an eastern palace rather than a cow-shed. I enter. The right side of the entrance hall is decorated by the photographs of the cows. Their Sanskrit names are written underneath the pictures, together with the names of their individual sponsors. On the opposite side, a Karmic statue gives the silent warning: if you kill me now, you will be killed another time (Picture 48: Appendix 4).

Everything feels immaculately but naturally clean. I spot some cows through the wide opening between the hall and the stable. They are just being milked, which is why they are inside. The happy noise of a flock of swallows set the stage inconspicuously. Memories of my childhood, when these birds were still present in abundance. According to the Hungarian Ornithology Institute²⁷, the swallow population in Hungary has radically dropped over the past few decades. Compared to fifty years ago, the loss exceeds fifty percent, and one variety – due to river management – has become almost extinct. This creates new problems for the environment, as invasive insects and mosquitos carrying new diseases need to be controlled artificially, which is expensive and less efficient than birds. Climate change is just one of the causes for swallow depletion. Changing social attitudes – explains the institute’s spokesman – prevents their nesting to avoid not only the ‘mess’ but also the ‘noise’ they make. But they are merrily chirping and flying around in the Hare Krishna stable. I do not ask about it, but I sense a symbiotic reciprocity in the shed between cow and bird.

Currently there are twenty cows, four Hungarian steppe cattle, one zebu (*bos indicus*) and twenty-four oxen on the farm. The zebu (a bull), an Indian breed, was acquired as part of a climate change adaptation plan. However, this experiment was unsuccessful.

²⁷ <http://www.mme.hu/>

All but one of his descendants (crossbreeds with *bos taurus*) are male, and although they are promising workers, the only female does not produce milk at all.

Three young men in their thirties and forties are milking about eight cows, one after the other. One is an Englishman who came to the valley to serve and learn about cow protection. He was brought up by devotee parents right next to the Manor in Watford. When he was nine years old, he and his family moved to India. Lately he has served in a Hare Krishna Temple in Slovenia, but it was in the city of Ljubljana and he was desirous to work on a farm instead. In his opinion, there is no comparison between the Manor and the Hungarian Krishna Valley cow protection schemes. The latter is so close to nature, and there is no buying of dairy, not even 'organic' from the outside. He loves it here. When I ask if he would be getting out of the valley, perhaps for a swim or just to look around, the answer is no. He would not be leaving the valley as long as he serves there. He seems to be detached from anything other than cows, although he is keeping in touch with his parents and some friends via social media. His parents are now divorced, with only one of them still following the faith. The other young man is from Slovakia, from a historically Hungarian town. His name is John. He is an exception in this community, as he comes from a lifestyle of heavy drug addiction, which is not the typical pathway in the Hungarian movement. After his first contact with the devotees he accepted their teaching and got clean for a year, but he relapsed. He told me that five years ago he got so disillusioned with his addictive lifestyle that he decided to give it up and surrender all to the Lord. As an expression of penitence, he walked one-hundred and sixty miles to the valley in a few days. The first day he covered more than fifty miles. That distance made his legs so stiff that the following day he had to lift his thigh up by hand to bring it to motion. He remembers it very well. Since his arrival he has been working with the cows. I did not need to ask if he was satisfied. He has become

a competent, skilled, and modest expert. He is happy in his position. John got married through an arrangement made by other devotees in the village. The story goes as follows. There were a few young men and a few young women working for the valley who wanted to get married. The Vedic horoscope was consulted and out of the different possible matches John was recommended to marry his best match with whom the result showed a high rate of compatibility. When the compatibility rate is above fifty percent, marriages are recommended. John is happy and considers himself blessed. He appears to be an ideal cowherd, and he proves this another day when he teaches me some of the secrets of milking and herding the cows.

I want to feel what it makes to milk a cow in practice, and the cowherds are very pleased to help me along patiently. They are not the least agitated by my presence. They are happy to see my joy in dealing with the cows. After all, to them, it is all about sharing compassion, love, connectivity and other Hare Krishna values. The milking process is like this: John and another cowherd guide the eight milking cows into the shed through the two side-doors. They are all given a bucket of special food and tied gently and loose into the nearest sidebars. Two of the herds are on duty, but a third, the leader of the shed, helps out as we are a bit behind schedule. While the cows are still eating, we brush their fur off around the udders so that hairs do not fall into the milk bucket. Cows are strong and heavy creatures, so the brushing needs to be firm and vigorous. I notice the differences between them. Some are cleaner than the others. Some are more reluctant to prepare for milking. When I touch them, I feel that one is very warm, much warmer than the others. John tells me that their temperatures, unlike humans', vary. I am now taught how to milk. John is very helpful and encouraging. He patiently shows me what to do. First, we wash the udders with warm water. I do not ask where the warm water comes from, but it is there in a clean bucket. Washing serves hygienic purposes

but the cows seem to enjoy it, too. It prepares them, slowly, for what is coming. There is no rush, but we have no time to waste, either. The drive to give milk drops within about thirty minutes, so the whole process needs to be done systematically and at a steady pace. The first sprinkle of milk lands on the ground. John explains that it once again serves hygienic reasons, but to him it is also a symbol of paying respect to mother earth. I learn that there are different types of hand milking. Westerners use the thumb and the pointing finger to make a ring and close the upper part of the udder (so that the milk does not flow back upward), while the other three fingers press out the foamy milk, aiming the liquid into the bucket. This is the valley's method, too. It is my turn. I am calm and the warmth and size of the cattle gives some sense of natural awe, something that is not conveyed through reading about Hindu cow protection. A little anxious not to lose time or waste milk, I am making my first clumsy moves. It is certainly not by stretching the teat up and down that milk lands into the bucket. Luckily, milk appears, and John tells me that for the first time it often does not work at all. He knows how to encourage. True, I manage to squeeze the warm milk somehow, but aiming into the bucket is harder work. I sacrifice some to mother earth, perhaps more than expected. When I turn it over to John to continue with his gently decisive and dynamic pace, I notice that the Englishman milking next to us is not sitting but standing beside the cow. John tells me that it is because that cow is so tall and her udders are too high up for a sitting position. By the time I milk the second, third and fourth cow, I learn that even the udders are so different that each requires a different technique. I wonder how machines used in the industry can provide this personal care. The last two cows need extra attention. They have calves and it is the weaning period. On Krishna farms calves and mothers are not separated from each other after birth, and even after weaning, calves are brought by the side of the mother for the satisfaction and happiness

of both. At present, as separation is still in progress, calves are fed for a short period, then taken away from mothers who can then be milked. Intense sucking has hurt an udder of a cow, so special attention is needed not to let the calf or the cowherd hurt it again. Assistance and intervention is necessary from the part of the human owner, and the relationship seems to be reciprocal and interdependent.

After each cow is milked, the milk is measured and the yield is recorded. Milking here is done twice a day, at regular intervals. In factory farms it is often done three times daily. When the work is finished, milk is stored and sold within the various departments of the community. Kitchens will need it for cooking for religious purposes as well as community needs. Sweets made from milk are considered to be the pleasantest of offerings in the sight of the deities. Krishna (also Govinda: protector of cows) and Srila Prabhupada honours it above all foods.

Herding cows

After milking, John asks me to help the department out with cow herding as there is a shortage of staff today. I am happy to help out. With a stick placed in my hand I am ready to learn through experience. The stick is not there to punish the animals, only to guide and discipline. A fairly spacious land is available for grazing, and we need to herd the animals to a remote spot as this year a new grazing scheme is introduced on the farm. The head of the ox department explained that the new scheme was set in place to avoid the under- or over-grazing mistakes of previous years. In both cases the ratio between acreage of grass and the number of animals was out of balance. When under-grazing occurs, too few cows are allowed on too spacious a land, resulting in the consumption of the most palatable grasses while the less pleasing ones invade the soil.

In times of over-grazing, cows are constrained into an area which is not optimal in size, resulting in the decay of grass and soil. To avoid these errors, professional advice was sought and the community opted for rotational grazing, which means that meadows are visited for shorter periods, so they all can be kept in good condition. This requires more exercise for cowherds, and as paths for the cattle are not fully established, I am now needed to prevent them from wandering away. John had an accident a few days ago when the horn of the cow hurt him inadvertently, although normally they are very gentle and mindful with their horns. We have a wonderful time under the warm Hungarian sun, and nature again comes close for a few peaceful hours.

Oxen

When a calf is male, it is kept for working purposes, to serve and to be served. When the ox is one year old, he is castrated through a mechanical method which – allegedly – does not cause much pain. Training him requires much patience and time. Learning to execute the elementary tasks such as cart-towing takes about two years. Training for specialised labour may take up to five years. The language of training is Sanskrit, but it is a departmental or individual preference for Indian customs, rather than an organisational obligation. Training requires some tools like the nose-ring, which is regarded as the least harmful means of discipline. When their productive years are over, the community still carries on protecting both cows and oxen.

Paul, the leader of the oxen department explained to me the details and rationale behind this work (Interview 28: Appendix 1). As the community needs milk, and according to ahimsa principles animals are not put to slaughter, devotees need to find useful labour for the oxen. When he explains to people how he views cow as mother figure,

everybody understands, apart from those who have cows. I tell them that we do not kill our mothers, either. We understand, they say, but where is the use value and the profit – they ask. So really, they do not understand. But we approach the question not based on economics but on principle. (ibid.)

This principle is prompted by non-violence and a cow veneration based on reciprocal relationship. According to Krishna philosophy, oxen need meaningful labour as well as humans do. Oxen as well as men need to fulfil their *dharma*, which means an appointed and destined position as calling in the Hindu culture. Paul quoted his spiritual master who said: “even if the ox just circles around for no reason, it must be kept busy for its own dharmic satisfaction”. He also quotes ISKCON’s founder Srila Prahbupada saying: “If you find no work for your oxen, you will sell or kill them”. These are the spiritual rationales for working with oxen.

When new ox workers are trained, Paul gives them the opportunity to train the young oxen on their own for a few months, so that animal and worker can get used to each other. Potential mistakes can easily be corrected at this stage. The two main principles are regularity and consistency. At present, oxen on the farm are used for eco-tourism (cart rides), cutting hay, transport and ploughing.

Paul explains that horses may do a better (much faster) job, but they would be competitors for the oxen, just like tractors. Milk consumption has a strong spiritual drive attached to it in Krishna communities, and because horses do not provide milk, oxen must be occupied and horses and tractors (in theory) kept far away to prevent temptations for workers. Paul himself explains that while slowness is part of this lifestyle, he is at times tempted to find faster means, especially in stressful times when bad weather comes into play. For example, as far as harvesting cereals and cutting hay is concerned, a tractor could do the work far more efficiently and at the time when output is the most optimal, but they refuse to choose that option. Harvesting cereal

crops or hay by oxen on a land of two-hundred acres takes about eight weeks. It is a slow process which yields better quality at the expense of quantity, and it is more sustainable. Paul wants to establish a standardised labour that could be continued into the next millennium. While financial viability (avoiding deficit) is also an aim, his main wish is to produce nutritious food without using fuel, electricity and chemicals. A fuel based agriculture, he says, may be practised for one or two hundred years, but the method he follows is thousands of years old, and still working. As far as innovations are concerned, he is not against them, but he prefers to innovate on the towed machinery and not the engine. The engine to him, the ox, is already given. The most immediate aim of this work unit is to acquire machinery for conservation farming, a method that avoids ploughing and does the sowing by as little intervention as possible. There are solutions for this on the market, but they are too heavy, being tractor dependent, and the oxen need much smaller versions. Another plan is to build or acquire a machine which the oxen could operate for sawing wood, and threshing and grinding grains. Reinventing traditional machinery is costly and time-consuming. Innovation may take several years of experiments.

Besides understanding issues of peak oil, Paul shows awareness of changing weather patterns and global warming. His ideas are established spiritually as well as scientifically. When talking about conservation farming, he gives the detailed example of another Hungarian farm whose organic matter content has now reached as much as 13% through this method. This is favourable in times of extreme weather conditions as the structure of the soil prevents land from flooding or drying out under such circumstances. As part of shifting to conservation farming the first few years a machinery called 'gluber' – in his words – would be used. This loosens the soil but

does not turn it over. Then a disc can be used to clean the top layer of weeds. This is a gentle way of farming with only the necessary minimum input on the human side.

According to Paul, introducing new breeds also requires careful studies of professional literature, visits, and decades of experimentation. For example, acquiring a zebu in the community may have been a spiritual attraction rather than a choice carefully thought through. As a result, and for other genetic and practical reasons, cows are now inseminated artificially, which may not be the ideal example in a cow protection programme, and may raise some ethical questions for activist movements.

Conversion

In the previous chapters I gave accounts of individual conversions to Hare Krishna spirituality and practices. While they were individual cases, specific aspects in their narratives recur in their experiences as they embraced the collective identity of the movement. Data show that converts at all three sites commonly question the dominant values and ways of doing in mainstream society, which is in line with how Johnston et al. (1994: 10) explain identification in new social movements. For Krishna believers capitalism, materialist accumulation, and the television set become unattractive, while simplicity, satisfaction, vegetarianism and contemplation take their place. The idea of an earth created rather than evolved is also a common theme.

Beyond these points, conversions may show regional commonalities that are worth considering. It is well established, for example, that in the 1960s and 70s of America it was the social segment of a hippy population that most readily identified with the movement's culture. Hippies were at first not intentionally targeted by Srila Prabhupada's outreach. Their interest was contingent upon a set of circumstances that

prepared the way for their spiritual conversion (Zeller, 2010: 73-88). Likewise, historical events may have contributed to the wave of conversions taking place in Hungary after the collapse of communism (1989). In this section I present how Hungarian young people in their teens and twenties turned toward spiritual answers to life's questions.

When interviewing my research co-ordinator, who was the only woman I interviewed in the Krishna Valley, she told me that conversions in the country were just simple stories of average people who found Krishna philosophy appealing. Though stories of how drug addicts or dealers accepted the faith may be intriguing, they are not common here. Spiritual epiphanies and transcendent interventions are not normally highlighted. Indeed, and this is how it is perceived by devotees, the collapse of communism opened opportunities in the spiritual realm which led young people into the Krishna community via intellectual routes. Faith organisations were permitted to enter the country and disseminate their beliefs, and those who were inquiring could make informed decisions about which spiritual path to choose. (Some other churches based their recruitment methods on emotional attractions, for example healing shows.) Most of my interviewees were at the time of joining the community secondary or university students, or completing their national service which was mandatory in those days. Generally, it was not Krishna food that attracted them, but the philosophy accompanying the faith. Nearly all referenced the Bhagavad Gita as a major source of interest and turning point in their life. Partha prabhu, an agrarian engineer, reported to have read it and found that "everything that was written there was truth dearest to my heart". Partha took active part in an environmental movement from 1989, the same year when communism collapsed in the country. He wanted to study zoology, and he goes on to relate his story as follows:

What functioned in nature was attractive to me and seemed too intelligent. Everything appeared systematically designed, and I was looking for its Creator. In my opinion, things were not so randomised as the scientific world claimed them to be. I began to study religions to find the true source behind it all. After consulting many things, I arrived at the Vedic culture, and the Bhagavad Gita in particular. [...] It gave logical answers to my questions and I took a liking in it straight away. (Interview 24: Appendix 1)

The education manager shared the same experience when he read the Bhagavad Gita which he first borrowed from a friend before obtaining his own copy. He too had been studying religions in search for an intelligent source as he had doubted the notion of a universal ‘big bang’. He still remembers the hour when, after a university exam, he and his peers were walking down the high street of Szeged discussing the correct answers to the exam. They then met Sankirtan workers who sold him a copy of the Bhagavad Gita.

Neither Partha prabhu nor the manager found their way to the community through dietary channels, but both received Krishna food as part of the philosophy. Reasons for a meat-free diet now seemed more meaningful to them than previously raised arguments regarding health or ecology. Partha explained that as vegetarianism to a degree often makes part of environmental agendas, he had gone meat-free several times, sometimes for a few months, sometimes for a whole year. But when he met the Krishna philosophy some twenty years ago, the practice settled into his life once and for all. In his opinion people become vegetarian for emotional, health or spiritual reasons, of which he thinks “the most stable practitioners are those who have a philosophical understanding as an underlying stimulant for practice” (Interview 24: Appendix 1).

Some other interviewees began their spiritual journey triggered by an interest in the Hindu doctrine of reincarnation and related themes. Some, who were teenagers at the time or serving in the army sometimes found it difficult to fulfil the dietary rules at

once, but gradually and eventually all managed to shift to pure vegetarianism. Their stories, in conjunction with the rest of interviews and conversations, reveal that identification is usually a process which, even when relatively fast, consists of several milestones before converging into membership in the Hare Krishna faith. In most cases, years may go by before a second or third remarkable encounter with the faith or its followers set or reset novices on path.

Though not the main point of attraction in the Hungarian Krishna Valley, Krishna prasadam and especially cooking successfully encouraged some to carry on as community chefs or restaurant managers. Food and diet sooner or later necessarily become relevant issues for practice, but it is not always Krishna food that first attracts novices to the faith. Very often, in almost every single case in Hungary, reading the scriptures, and particularly the Bhagavad Gita, is referenced as one of the most important means of identification. Temple communities are also mentioned, where devotees met like-minded individuals who supported their development. In some conversion accounts the influence of friends and family members are highlighted. In terms of dietary maintenance, the help of the community is seldom referenced directly, but indirect references (e.g. to coherence: ‘everybody shares the same values here’; Interview 23: Appendix 1) and observations reveal that a fully vegetarian community makes vegetarianism a relatively easy practice to follow.

Compared to the Hungarian pattern, the British cases were similar in the sense that Krishna philosophy provided converts with an alternative solution to what was deemed as materialistic and consumerist in society. Converts report to have been searching for happiness that goes contrary to holiday-making and material accumulation. Differences are also shown between the countries in that for example music was not mentioned in the Krishna Valley at all, while in Karuna Bhavan almost every convert mentioned it

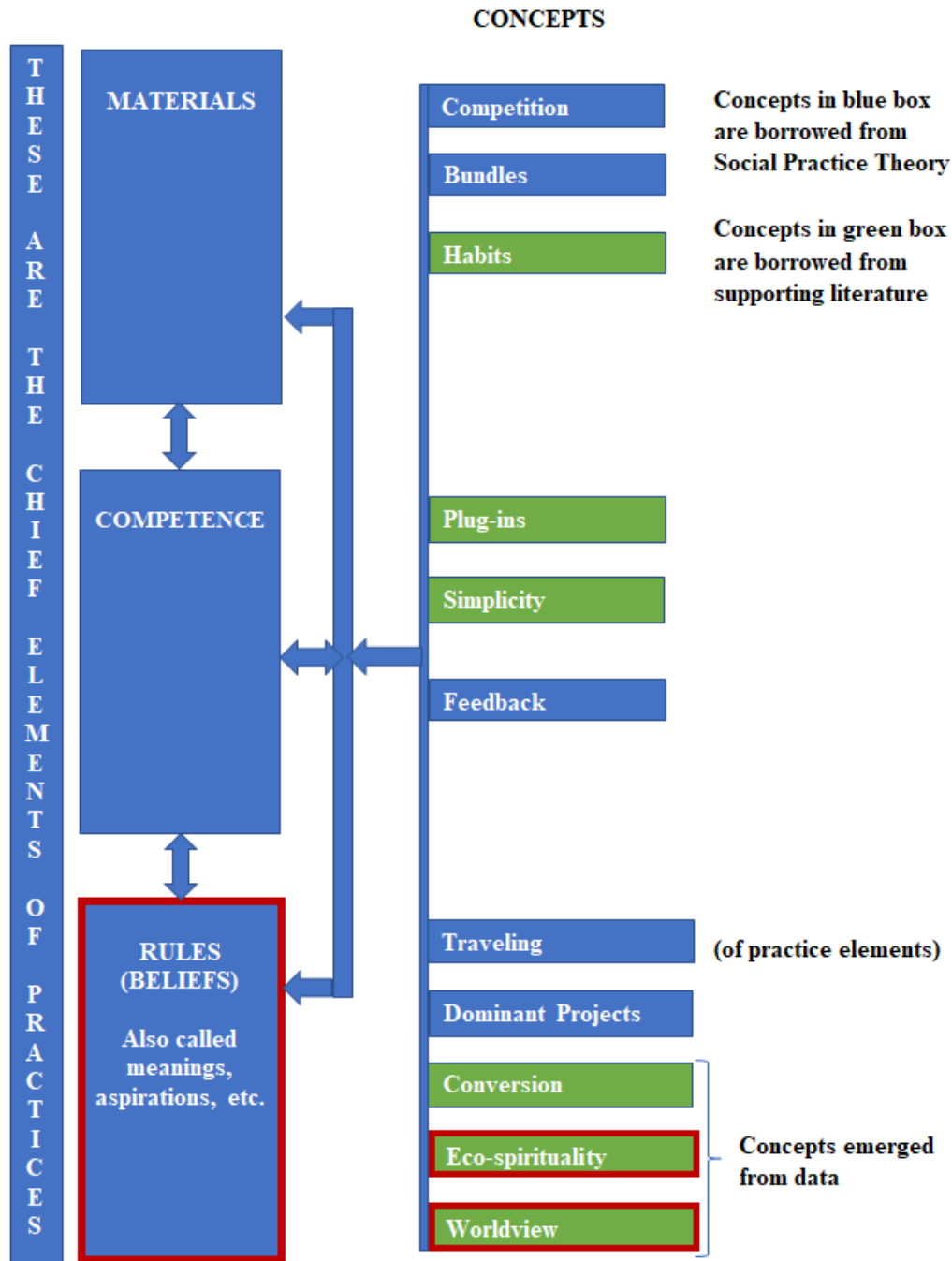
as an attraction. The reason may lie in the fact that in Britain a thriving rock generation had already been developed by the 1970s, whose fans and musicians may have found a more meaningful alternative in ‘playing for Krishna’. While part of this community in Britain also embraced vegetarian and vegan principles, these principles never found entry into the Hungarian subculture alongside the same musical trends. In Britain, as there was no communism to turn over, other historical contingencies prepared the way for entry into the Krishna community. Similar to the North American case, a range of British hippies and rock musicians became fascinated with the Indian culture from the 1970s onwards. This – through celebrities like George Harrison – strongly contributed to the development of what later became Hare Krishna farm communities.

CHAPTER 8. DISCUSSION

I now turn to a practice framework offered by Social Practice Theory to analyse Hare Krishna spirituality in the context of Sustainability Transitions. Theorists of social practice believe that the social world is assembled by social practices and the widespread complexes they form (Reckwitz 2017: 114). Following this, social change – the object of numerous inquiries – is the aggregate outcome of changes in social practices. Thus, it is important to understand how transitioning to Hare Krishna philosophy and practice comes about and what patterns can be drawn for the benefit of theories of social practice and Sustainability Transitions. To maintain a Krishna community, converts are needed who embrace its collective identity, hence I first inquire into how conversion takes place and how this leads to a new bundle of more sustainable social practices in converts' everyday life. After this I broaden my focus and address issues of practice stabilisation, maintenance and decay at the community level, by focusing on Krishna food practices and on the communities' spatial arrangement. I emphasise the durability of Krishna vegetarianism and the longevity of Krishna eco-communities, and offer these findings for further consideration. I argue that spirituality is the main driving force behind the successful survival and educational activity of the three eco-farms. This argument leads to broader questions about ISKCON's position within the larger network of eco-communities, which I also evaluate. Finally, I juxtapose Hare Krishna vegetarianism with meat-based practices by presenting the two in competition with each other. Practice remains the central subject throughout the chapter, but the unit of analysis gradually shifts from a micro to a macro perspective, from scrutinising the individual to evaluating the social.

On the following page I visually illustrate the chief analytical elements and how they interconnect and feed into the basic framework offered by Social Practice Theory.

A SOCIAL PRACTICE THEORY FRAMEWORK INFORMED BY AN EMPHASIS ON SPIRITUALLY MOTIVATED HUMAN AGENCY



A general Social Practice Theory approach would focus on the material element of practices. In contrast, this framework is designed to accentuate human agency in the stabilisation of food practices in Hare Krishna communities. The interconnected concepts listed on the right feed into the main practice elements on the left. In my proposition, supported by data, the element of Rules/Beliefs has predominance in maintaining Krishna food practices. Hence the red outline.

Further Explanations on the Presented Framework

According to Social Practice Theorists, it is practices that constitute the social world, while they are constitutive of practice elements. In order to follow practices, their stabilisation or decay, we are advised to scrutinise and follow their interconnected elements. Materials, Competences and Rules/Beliefs are claimed to be the necessary composites of every social practice, of which the overall emphasis falls on the material. In contrast, data collected in the Krishna communities reveal that food practices are primarily motivated by spiritual beliefs more than any other determinants. To demonstrate this, I have designed a framework which helps to analyse and evaluate findings by stressing the role of human agency in this particular context, while also drawing on the practice-centred insights offered by Social Practice Theory.

As will be shown in the following sections, Social Practice Theory offers concepts (marked in blue boxes on the right) which are valuable to understand the enabling and disabling factors of localised practice and social change through an understanding of practices and how they stabilise or change. A dominant project, for example, which individuals pursue through daily practice enactments, together with accompanied practices (bundles), may prevent practitioners from confirming to any proposed cultural norms or intended behaviour. Similarly, positive feedbacks for enactment may play an important role in behaviour choice, a fact which is not to be underestimated. In most cases, these and the rest of the concepts shown in the chart do not provide the titles of the discussion sections below, but recur at various levels of analysis. The actual titles cover the main subject areas which either emerged in the research field: conversion and food; or in theoretical readings: making sense of large phenomena. My purpose is to present these major themes and connect findings to possibilities of infusion of Hare Krishna practice(s) into wider society. By doing this I also

demonstrate the prominent role of human agency in Hare Krishna practice, and suggest that worldview is given more consideration when sustainability transitions are concerned.

Apart from the concepts shown in blue in the above visual, there is a long list in the vocabulary of practice theorist to select from according to the dictates of the empirical context examined. As explained in the methods chapter (Chapter 3), I synchronised data with some of the tenets/concepts of Social Practice Theory to show how local and social meat-free dietary practices are changed, maintained and/or disabled through the interconnected and aggregate impact of several motivators. Similar frameworks could be applied to analyse the environmental practices of other spiritual communities, but data collected elsewhere could render some of the current factors as non-important, and vice versa. Also, depending on findings in other settings, more agency may be attributed to the non-spiritual (e.g. material) elements of practice than in the Hare Krishna case. As stressed in the literature review (Chapter 2), one of the significance of empirical work is to determine the nature and degree of agency through a study of the ‘ontic’ rather than merely the ‘ontological’ (Stone,). In this sense, as this present framework came to life only after collection and consideration of data, it will need to be adjusted according to the dynamics of any new research fields where it may be applied.

Apart from the concepts offered by Social Practice Theory, I turn to supporting bodies of literature to analyse Krishna spirituality and diet (concepts shown in green boxes). As part of embracing the Hare Krishna worldview, devotees go through a spiritual conversion, which I demonstrated in detail in the empirical chapters. In this discussion I analyse the nature of these conversions by also relating personal transformation to wider social aspects such as sustainability transitions and climate policy intervention.

These concepts (or rather, the mechanisms they describe) play out differently in different social contexts. In this thesis I do not prioritise one above the other except for assigning high importance to eco-spirituality and worldview which need to be emphasised as well as the Rules/Beliefs element of practice (all marked by red outline). The rest of the factors are equally interconnected and I treat them as additional contributors without any intention to order them by merit or ranking. What is important for the purposes of this thesis is to show how these factors feed into the three main practice elements (listed in blue on the left), of which human agency (as manifest in rules/beliefs) appears to be chief in enabling Krishna food practices.

A so-called practice framework is useful for this thesis as it is increasingly stated by theorists of various backgrounds (see Chapter 2) that without demand side reductions and lifestyle simplifications a system-wide sustainability transition is non-imaginable. The Hare Krishna philosophy and practice dovetail with this thought, and as such ‘simplicity’ became an inevitable part of the framework. This simplicity emerges from a specific spiritual worldview, which appears to be undetachable from Hare Krishna practice. Supporting literature claims that worldview has a direct correlation with environmental behaviour, hence it will be important to stress that beliefs (and worldview) may play an important role for sustainability transitions, as far as corresponding practice is concerned. By showing how the Krishna belief system is connected to practice, my purpose is to redirect the technological focus of Sustainability Transitions research towards a more dynamic understanding of agency and the radical consideration of human motivation and worldview.

Finally, while the majority of the framed concepts described here help to draw conclusions which are contextual and remain at community level, practice theorists aim at connecting findings to wider, macro level mechanisms in order to make sense of

large phenomena as well as localised factors. Though a high degree of contingency is acknowledged when change in social practice is conceptualised, it is possible to juxtapose practices and provide evaluative explanations about the way they develop. Framing practices as competing entities is a helpful theoretical tool to describe social trends and judge their potential outcome yet to be seen. Practical as well as cognitive aspects of these competitions feed into practices of localised and baseline varieties, influencing their elements in ways which are possible to judge and describe. In the final part of this chapter I follow this nascently developed tool (explained in more detail later) in order to position Hare Krishna food practices in relation to sustainability transitions.

I now turn to discussing findings by first drawing on concepts of primarily micro relevance, then gradually widening the perspective towards broader societal levels.

Conversion

Conversion research has long established that spiritual conversions result in a radical change of conduct (e.g. Rambo, 1993: 173; Zinnbauer and Pargament, 1998: 163). However, little if anything is said about the durability of change thus taking place. Hare Krishna findings reveal that transitioning to a Krishna identity through conversion leads to durable, sustainable practices in the lives of adherents. With change and transitions in focus, it is important to analyse the nature and the motivational factors of these conversions, and the durability of practices supported and followed by them.

Conversion as an Additional 'Plug-in' for Sustainability

Conventional consumption ethics are challenged by social scientists globally, in some cases putting forward ethical consumption as a supra-moral alternative. The term supra-moral refers to an attitude that goes beyond the limits of what is traditionally and conventionally expected, imposed or recognised by society (Kupperman, 1999: 172). In Chapter 2 I drew attention to Latour's (2005: 235) proposal about asking religious people why they do what they do, and his concept about 'plug-ins' (ibid. 209), which allow actors to make competent consumer choices. I also referenced Wenell (2016: 34) in suggesting that supra-moral alternatives of consumption may be more readily attainable to adherents of religion than nonreligious people. Following Wenell's interpretation (2016: 34), spiritual conversions, when accompanied by the orthopraxy (religious praxis) of meat-free diets, may serve as plug-ins for consumer competences (in our case: vegetarianism) unavailable to non-spiritual consumers.

To conceptualise the dietary practice in eco-spiritual communities one step further, turning to insights of Social Practice Theory will be helpful. Following the concepts of Social Practice Theory, I briefly emphasise how the dietary competences of eco-spiritual communities are enhanced by repeatedly sharing conversion narratives.

Social Practice Theory postulates that practices evolve and survive through their main elements of meanings/beliefs, materials and competences, and the dynamic coevolution and interrelation of these three (Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012). According to the interviews and observations made in the visited communities, it is clear that spiritual conversion stories remap the meanings-materials-competences union by strengthening each of these elements. Meanings/beliefs are highly affirmed and cultivated by these narratives which can also be understood as testimonies to the faith, as there are dense elements of religiosity in them. (For instance, Michael's perception of Krishna food as

the original 'pedigree'). The competence for the vegetarian dietary choice is maintained by the exclusively spiritual plug-ins of the faith (such as its teachings, beliefs and spiritual practices), by favouring its taste, cultivating feelings of compassion, or experiencing healing during periods of conversion and beyond, only to name a few. In turn, as one major project, the community and its members are organised into knowledge communities which ensure that all the materials, such as cultural and health food items, special ingredients, and necessary equipment, are in place – while others excluded - to support practitioners in their vegetarian practices. This partly happens through growing and preparing their own food, as in the case of these eco-farms, but the outreach events of the worldwide movement, such as lectures, cooking shows, exhibitions, or food sharing activities also serve to secure materials and material knowledge for future competence. The usefulness of the cognitive assistance and practical support of epistemic and/or online communities (recipes, idea exchange, events) is also acknowledged by theorists of social practice (e.g. Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012: 49). Thus, it appears that conversion experiences too play their part in contributing to the solidification of the dietary grip, as they serve as one additional plug-in to draw upon when dietary choices are made.

Though in its philosophy Social Practice Theory refers to practices and their stabilisation or change as highly contingent phenomena, it is also proposed that any constellation to encourage or strengthen the elements of practices, creates conducive environments for their survival. As elements of practice are strengthened through a wider variety of plug-ins than in non-spiritual contexts, it seems possible that the practice itself becomes more stable in these communities. Indeed, several devotees reported to have tried vegetarianism before their spiritual turn, but success was only temporary.

Another invaluable finding about spiritual conversions is that of their incremental character, often accompanied by a disenchantment with mainstream culture and feelings of non-belonging. Converts had often been seeking meaningful engagement, and what they found in the Krishna community offered them viable alternatives. It generally took years for devotees to fully embrace the new lifestyle practices. In their narratives, they remember milestones that led them step by step up to the point of complete identification with diet and faith. This is relevant for a concept of habits, to be addressed later, and for reminding us that any one social encounter with sustainable practice may serve as a mediatory event for future choices. Thinking of the eco-farm tourism or the food sharing programmes, one-time experiences may contribute to one's future and long-term arrival at sustainable practices, and not necessarily within the same organizational setting. This is how Tomas, a wwoofer volunteer in Karuna Bhavan, is now working in a vegan restaurant as a Buddhist believer. He had been disillusioned with his job as a bank clerk, and embraced some of the practices he learnt on the farm, but not all. Some elements of the Krishna food practices (e.g. compassion, but competence too) 'travelled' out of their original setting and landed in new configurations. This kind of journeying is an insightful tenet of Social Practice Theory, to be occurring contingently throughout the zigzagged and interconnected historicity of practices and their elements. I provided empirical examples of how practice travel from one bundle to another without necessarily carrying all its elements with itself. Food can translate into the lives of non-Krishna yoga practitioners and university students who were initially interested in meditation, music or stress-relief programs. The food-sharing programmes also have great relevancy here. Friendship, or a sense of belonging, may in such cases become a mediatory tool through which vegetarianism travel to even unexpected corners. Food, eaten together, as a sign of love and equality

appears to bond people together on these occasions. Each enactment prepares the way for the next, and contributes to stabilising practices and forming new variations through decontextualization and recontextualization (Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012: 49). In a business setting, Hare Krishna vegetarian restaurants (110 in number) may bring about similar criss-crosses in the trajectory of practice. These processes of contextualisation are significant in that they draw the inquirer's attention away from, in this present case, the Krishna movement as a religious organisation, and direct it toward practice and competence.

But more than just eating, Hare Krishna conversion links with a number of everyday practices which are more sustainable and less CO₂ intensive. Embracing 'intrinsic' values rather than consumerism, Krishna followers show happiness, well-being and contentment without seeking satisfaction in consumerism. Novelty hunting and accumulation are not on the list of devotees' everyday practices, as a sense of belonging, self-acceptance and affiliation (Jackson, 2009: 148) already fulfil their wants. Devotees consciously renounce shopping activities and material acquisitions. They give verbal expression to the fact that they do not need more stuff. Instead, they find satisfaction in worship, singing, reading, serving, teaching, gardening and cooking. Several of the conversion stories contain elements of disenchantment with secular holiday-making and akin ambitions. In two out of the three locations devotees do not own cars, and community-owned cars are mostly used for outreach purposes. Converts focus on sharing and service, meaningful activities, rather than their own material development, or accumulation of goods. Holiday-making, shopping and out-of-farm entertainment are not organisationally restricted, they are personally and spiritually arranged this way. Devotees seek meaningful employment instead of idle and 'miserable' entertainment. Gardening, cooking, reading, studying, sharing and serving

occupy their time. As such, Hare Krishna lifestyle practices meet the demands of a new economics based on voluntary simplicity rather than materialistic wealth. Krishna practices also harmonise with what recent research (Wynes and Nicholas, 2017) claims as the most effective ways to mitigate climate change: a plant-based diet, having one fewer child²⁸, living car-free, and avoiding airplane travel.

Transitioning to Hare Krishna simplicity provides an empirical case for Sustainability Transitions research as it entails everyday practices which are less CO₂ intensive. Beyond this, it represents a system which works outside the laws of consumerism. In some approaches to Sustainability Transitions, there is no other trajectory to a systemic transition than to rebuild a new system of prosperity from the bottom-up (Jackson, 2009: 192), which also needs societal and economic rearrangement. In Jackson's words (ibid.), 'freeing ourselves' from materialistic constraint – individually and communally – is the 'basis of change'. The conversion experiences and the resulting practices in the examined communities show that Hare Krishna devotees have already realised this goal to an extent.

Finally, conversion concepts also remind us about disillusioned people in search of viable alternatives. The collective identity of new social movements – as referenced in Chapter 2 – is often 'defenced' by 'challenging the dominant system' (Johnston et al., 1994: 10). Hare Krishna practices stabilise not only through the channel of the spiritual lessons converts turn to, but also through an explicit and radical distanciation from what they leave behind. As such, knowing that there are people who already look for lifestyle alternatives, and knowing that one-time encounters with more sustainable practices may contribute to change at a later point in life, climate policy making may want to

²⁸ As a result of renunciation, Krishna communities have fewer children, a fact which I do not elaborate on or evaluate in this thesis.

encourage social ties with Hare Krishna converts in order to invite their ecological practices to broader levels.

Spiritual conversion is a radical shift in personal worldview, and as worldviews show correlation with pro-environmental behaviour (Witt, Boer and Boersema, 2014), it is important for Sustainability Transitions to identify worldview types in support of higher ecological commitment. Transforming to Hare Krishna belief through spiritual conversion encourages pro-environmental attitudes and practices. By embracing Hare Krishna beliefs based on reincarnation, creation and compassion, converts embrace an eco-spiritual worldview which is instrumental in stabilising more sustainable practices. As part of this worldview, Krishna devotees follow an animal ethics which is supported by multiple aspects of the belief system, such as re-incarnation, creation, equality, interconnectedness, cow veneration, spiritual and physical purity, and more. This multiplicity contributes to the stabilisation of more sustainable dietary practices, the ties of which would be hard to sever. By understanding these multiple factors (plugins) as parts of a consistent belief system, I claim that it is none other practice elements but Rules/Beliefs which, as agency for change, contributes the most towards the vegetarian food practices in the Hare Krishna movement. After presenting individual conversion as one of such practice motivators, I now turn to other explanations about how pro-environmental practices are maintained persistently in Hare Krishna eco-communities. The focus now shifts to community level and to the topic of food.

Spiritual Food: Prasadam

Spiritual Motivation and Worldview as Elements of Practice and Agency for Change

Through combining theory with empirical cases, Social Practice Theory developed a range of concepts for the analytical understanding and description of localised and large-scale social practices. To repeat, valuable for this study is a set of tools that explains how Hare Krishna practices and their bundles hold together by the historical co-evolution of their elements (rules/beliefs, materials, competences). Of such elements, generally, material artefacts are posited as the most determinant. Indeed, Krishna communities living on farms, and their practices, can clearly be grasped in relation to what ‘stuff’ is readily available (to eat, watch, buy, etc.), and what is not. Also, as depicted in the empirical chapters, the spatial arrangements of the farms are as such as to encourage a unique Hare Krishna lifestyle of simplicity and more sustainable practices.

According to theorists of social practice, practices are not chosen by their practitioners, but vice versa, they are the ones recruited by the practices. Actors are called ‘body-minds’, or carriers of practice, with but limited agency for change and the survival of practices (Reckwitz, 2002: 256). While this may be a helpful and useful message for several societal and research settings (e.g. showering, snowboarding, driving etc.), and for policy intervention in particular (see Chapter 9 for more details), my empirical findings emphasise the significance of spiritual agency as the underlying drive behind Krishna food practices. Clearly, even the material and spatial arrangements are infused with spiritual motivators. All eco-practices described in the previous chapters are triggered by the believers’ spiritual understanding (worldview, beliefs) and motivation. This is especially true for eating prasadam, which members also call spiritual food. Practices of the entire food cycle are inspired and characterised by spirituality and

symbols. Believers see a soul in every living being, which determines their connectedness to nature and the entire universe. Ahimsa principles demand compassionate treatment for animals, especially the cow as the mother figure who gives without asking in return. Eating is enacted for Krishna's glory and spiritual growth in perfecting character. Love and mood are believed to enter the soul-body in proportion with the spiritual quality of the cook and the process of preparation. Sharing is spiritual service to proclaim and diffuse love and devotion. Thus, I argue for members to be called mind-bodies rather than body-minds who, against the currents of the outside world, opt into following a diet that may not be the most obvious choice in their immediate, social environment. The term body-mind allows for little human agency and places the individual under the constraints of the body and the physical reality surrounding the practitioner. In the Hare Krishna context, a movement which promotes consciousness through its very name (ISKCON: International Society of Krishna Consciousness), this works differently. Members are explicitly taught and spiritually driven to choose consciously between baseline and alternative food practices, in the face of any material arrangements their body encounters in the outside world. This otherworldliness makes mind to be the leader, the spiritual choice of which the body should follow.

By this statement I argue that agency for practice and change is situated in context. It is a dynamic category that varies from case to case, hence practice theorists need to be careful of portioning out pre-set degrees of structure and agency for the practices they investigate. Both localised and large-scale forms of practice may hide different and dynamic (levels of) motivational factors that are crucial to understand.

I propose that Hare Krishna environmentalism is predominantly (with or without material reinforcements) spiritual in nature as it is galvanised by other-worldly

principles and ethics (such as compassion) rather than this-worldly materialism. As presented before, pioneering research shows that specific worldviews correlate with specific environmental behaviours (Witt 2012; Witt, Boer and Boersema, 2014). It is therefore suggested that these worldviews, including their affective, emotional dimensions, be examined when the elements of practice are inventoried, followed up, and linked to the concepts of Sustainability Transitions.

Durability of Food Practices

To emphasize again, Hare Krishna food practices are nurtured by spiritual motivators. “It is the food that got me” – exclaimed one of the devotees, and most others reported that Krishna food influenced their identification process. All devotees, without exception, regard Krishna food as a spiritual entity that, for them, conditions spiritual growth and the path to perfection. Love and Devotion is the motto of appreciation. Love must be cooked into the food as the main ingredient, while devotion is offered to Krishna during preparation and meal offering. Cooking is preceded and finished by prayers. A peaceful composure is to be assumed during the entire ‘service’ in the kitchen, where special mantras, music or spiritual talks are played back to uplift the soul. A strict ritual purity is maintained during preparation, serving and eating. These spiritual extras substitute the tasting of the food, which is not permitted before serving. Krishna needs to taste the food first, the flavour of which is not secured by the amount of salt but by the level of the chef’s ‘loving’ attitude. The degree of fascination with prasadam is high. It assumes an emotional character. It is spiritually driven. Clearly, in Hare Krishna context spirituality becomes the leading stimulant for food practices, including its production and sharing.

Apart from spiritual reasons, members are also particularly aware of the fact that meat production requires far more natural, human and energy resources, hence the Krishna diet is environmentally significant and more sustainable. They reason that their practices are less carbon-intensive as they require less energy, less water, less deforestation and less transport. Devotees encourage organic farming on similar grounds. Thus, the spiritual, ethical and religious teachings are supplemented by some purely rational reasoning to provide a holistic set of rules (meanings, beliefs) as a most crucial element of vegetarian practices in the community. These rules appear to be engraved in the Krishna lifestyle to such a degree where both materials and skills necessary to perform practices become subject to them.

Hence it is not feasible to simply filter findings through a general, albeit often useful, Social Practice Theory understanding of practices that revolves around the dominant significance of material artefacts for practice. There is little tendency on the farms to compromise food principles (except for the question of supermarket milk, which is sometimes rationalised). The community will provide, come what may, necessary equipment and raw materials for Krishna food preparation, even if items are purchased from India. The material context in the outside world (shops, pubs, adverts) have no power to dislodge the community's set dietary rules. These rules, though provided by the organisation, are also accepted and upheld individually, while competence (food preparation) is secured by recipe books, teachings, exhibitions and social relations. Although this protective setting is obviously instrumental for devotees in remaining vegetarian (there is no other choice), there is a strong motivational element, Hare Krishna spirituality, that brings this setting into being in the first place. Simplicity as well as other traits of spiritual connotation in Krishna communities (conviviality, connectivity, sharing and serving) contribute to the reproduction of vegetarian practices

through penetrating into every phase of the food cycle. Behind all these traits and practices there is the underlying agency of spiritual beliefs, the main driver for everyday enactment. I argue that an eco-spiritual worldview is the main determinant and motivational factor for more sustainable practice in Krishna communities. Should we take away materials and competences, the Hare Krishnas could find ways to remedy the loss thus occurred, but without spirituality and beliefs (rules) their dietary system could collapse through want of motivation.

According to member interviews, spirituality is regarded as the social glue that holds the community together, and its role in the vegetarian practice is also acknowledged. Several devotees and sympathisers compared their steady vegetarianism with their earlier commitments opting in and out of the practice when spirituality was absent from their life. This brings spiritual dieting to the forefront as a durable practice in Krishna communities, a propensity supported by positive feedbacks received individually and collectively alike.

Feedbacks and Dominant Projects

Food practices on the Hare Krishna eco-farms form an entire bundle of practices from planting seed to sharing the food with outsiders, the appreciation of which contributes to the stabilisation of all distinct practices within the food cycle. Social Practice Theory's concept of positive or negative feedback (Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012: 99) offers an insightful point to raise here. Practitioners on the Krishna farms may monitor themselves and receive feedbacks in several ways. Negative feedbacks about Krishna vegetarianism did appear, according to literature (Rochford, 2007: 110), in the 1970s of the United States where secondary students were trying to assimilate with

their non-believer associates. In that particular context vegetarianism, as well as other Krishna practices, are reported to have created resentment and anxiety in the lives of followers. Since then, however, as stated by school teachers both in Hungary and the UK, vegetarianism has become a widely-recognised practice and such negative feedbacks are now exceptional.

Overall findings render positive feedbacks to be the present European norm concerning Krishna diet. As food is offered collectively for all members, and cooking is only allowed by appointed devotees, individual feedback on dietary practices is either not available or less relevant for their stabilisation. As such, the relation between dietary competence and diet becomes significant for practice mostly when members travel away. Otherwise, when they stay and eat on the farm, the question of individual competence shifts to the capability to find their role in the community, be it music, canvassing, teaching or gardening. If feedback in this context is positive through a strong sense of belonging, vegetarianism becomes an easy, dominant and ongoing project, often for a lifetime (fluctuation rate in the visited communities is low). According to Hindu belief in fulfilling one's *dharma* or calling, the community takes special care, patience and time in finding one's comfortable area of service, starting at early school age. I found no worker to be arbitrarily placed into his or her position, resulting in discomfort or dissatisfaction. When a mismatch becomes visible, alternative options are sought and made available, thus providing indirect feedback to the individual through psychological fulfilment, the value of which is frequently emphasised in relevant literature (see Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2008: 16).

More relevantly for practice, collective dietary feedbacks are offered daily from within and outside the community. Devotees who appreciate prasadam, which they effectively all and always seem to be doing, send positive feedbacks to the kitchen and its

managers. Eco-tourists expressing gratitude are another source of encouragement. The long queues in the streets of London and the verbal utterances of the partakers of the shared food attest to the usefulness of the programme. Television shows now do not present the community as an alien cult but a compassionate group of environmentalists pursuing organic farming and sustainable food practices. This links to a change in institutional pattern, which has resonance with the devotees.

In almost any conversation with community members, the spiritual benefits of Krishna prasadam were referenced, thus making it into a ‘dominant project’ for devotees, another significant concept for Social Practice Theory (Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012: 77-80). Dominant projects are important for one practical reason: time constraints will not permit practitioners to pursue several of such projects at one point in time. In theory, these projects are key contributors to the stabilization and maintenance of practices and their bundles, and to the weakening and decay of others which are temporally and spatially limited through them. In terms of diffusion of more sustainable dietary practices, communities pursuing vegetarianism as a dominant project may be instrumental in educating and influencing outsiders through examples and outreach programmes. The Hare Krishna community does this by its extensive eco-tourism as well as long established food sharing campaigns through which vegetarian practices become available to a high number of non-believers. Interestingly however, the social conviviality of eating together – despite any positive feedbacks and my own expectations – is not a straightforward constituent of Hare Krishna vegetarianism. The details of this are addressed below.

Eating Together

A de-growth or new economics approach to Sustainability Transitions suggests that one of the most important factors towards change lies in demand-side reductions and simplified lifestyle practices (Seyfang, 2009). Simplicity, frugality, conviviality, and sharing are all part of a vocabulary for a de-growth era (D'Alisa, Demaria and Kallis, 2014: 43), and these qualities are also manifest in the Krishna philosophy and practice. Conviviality is especially significant at a time when decline in the family meal is reported to be a global phenomenon (Yates and Warde, 2017).

Simplicity, as another salient factor, serves as the chief slogan in the ISKCON community subscribing to a 'simple living, high thinking' principle. In terms of ecological sustainability, the need for simplifying was especially stressed in the Krishna Valley where members often claimed it to be the most efficient way among all alternative solutions. However, Hare Krishna simplicity becomes somewhat complicated in performing practices of Indian culture and eating together. Most dishes prepared in the Krishna communities are of Indian origin. Although this may stand as an obstacle for beginners and outsiders who find it hard to reproduce the Indian meals, for community members (except for a few opposing opinions) it is a source of fascination rather than hindrance. There is a spiritual enthusiasm around Indian culture, which gets manifested in practices like wearing Indian clothes, painting the nose and forehead with Indian clay, using Indian names, distributing gender roles, and more. Some of these customs are moderately changing in the communities towards patterns of flexibility, which may partly be the outcome of adjusting outreach activities to contemporary social demands. However, for many Hare Krishna members, these are emblems of identity that should continue to remain to hold the community together.

Eating together is one of the prominent practices in Krishna communities. It is becoming a socially and scientifically important subject in connection with its documented decay especially in western regions (Yates and Warde, 2017; Kiefer, 2004). Eating can be a commensal practice where communities of people share location and time while consuming meals together. It can also be a convivial practice where people socialise, get to know each other, talk, share, rejoice, or simply put: love, as suggested by the commercial spread by the Canadian government in encouraging its citizens to eat together.²⁹ Both commensality and conviviality are deemed socially beneficial to solitary, segregated eating. Apart from healing eating disorders, eating together is claimed to positively impact general well-being and health (Weinstein, 2006). Studying this declining practice is crucial for society as its declared impact on health and well-being correlates with ecological, economic and social sustainability (Jackson, 2009: 149).

In my experience on the Hare Krishna farms, an initial sense of conviviality may seem promising when devotees and guests gather together on the floor, sometimes eating with their fingers while quietly talking. But this feeling may soon be over when – after a few meals consumed together – visitors notice a stark segregation and lack of sociability among the believers. Women and men sit apart and do not interact, as a norm. Devotees are centred upon the self by honouring prasadam and its merciful maker. As an unspoken rule, I observed, talking to each other and guests are not encouraged. Besides, regulations of purity and cleanliness may cause embarrassment and complications for visitors. “Generally and ideally”, explained a community manager in an email interview, “devotees eat 'with equals'”. For example, the brahmacharis [male monks] eat in the association of other brahmacharis, Swamis

²⁹ <http://eattogether.presidentschoice.ca/>

[religious teachers] amongst the Swamis etc. Prasad time is ideally not a social event, but rather time to respect and enjoy the prasad” (Interview 33: Appendix 1). Indeed, eating together is lacking in conviviality when it is practiced inside the community settings. Yet, when it takes place during food sharing activities or after outreach programmes, it assumes a cheerful and friendly, convivial character. This adds to our understanding of the social, health and environmental benefits of eating together (Weinstein, 2006). Conviviality and commensality are not equal phenomena, and while the former may powerfully bring about a range of social advantages (*ibid.*), the latter may serve to mark out boundaries rather than abolish them (Julier, 2013).

This exclusion and boundary-setting makes Krishna prasadam and eco-spirituality an ambiguous project in the sight of the outsider. This ambiguity, however, will most probably go unnoticed by the occasional visitor, without particularly weakening Hare Krishna vegetarianism. Rather, it is possible that whatever seems alien to the scrutinising eye, works towards stabilising institutional practice. I referenced earlier conversion narratives in which devotees, prior to joining the community, had been seeking after principles, rules and austerity of lifestyle. For them, the undiluted nature of spiritual messages was the very proof of the genuineness and valuableness of the Krishna faith. While this approach and its accompanied practices may not appeal to large masses of society, it may be a contributory factor in the organisation’s survival. The relevant literature states that a radical counter-culture and a determined, unwavering adherence to principles, especially if they challenge social conventions, may be beneficial for change (Carroll, 2004: 96). However, it is also argued that when eco-spirituality takes the form of self-centredness or narcissism, or when it is ‘too counter-cultural’, societal influence may be hindered (Lasch, 1978: 4; Taylor, 1989: 508; Witt 2013: 1061). This dilemma seems to be well addressed by current farm

managements by first: promoting tolerant and tactful behaviour, and second: organising outreach programmes that are appealing to outsiders. In my observation, ‘hardcore’ religiosity does not now interfere with the polite and efficacious education of interested citizens both through eco-tourism and the food-sharing campaigns. The current institutional pattern moderates religiosity in public outreach activities to an extent where visitors’ reception level can be kept optimal. The visited eco-farms show endurance both regarding individual practice and the communities’ survival. This longevity makes farm achievements especially interesting for Sustainability Transitions research. In what follows I now turn to evaluate these achievements by restressing the communities’ durability and the spiritual motivation it is supported by. The unit of analysis now widens further to include ISKCON’s all farm communities as well as other eco-communities in the world.

Spiritual Communities and Sustainability Transitions

Beyond personal spiritual motivation, it is the support of a coherent community of more sustainable practice that appears to be key for newcomers and old members alike.

This is how a long-term volunteer in Karuna Bhavan remembered his university years:

I wanted to be a vegetarian, I am very gentle towards animals but when you live in the outside world, when you live in society or you have a career you know, is like I was working as a student intern, I used to go to office around 6.30-7, walk-walk-walk and come back, and by the time I reached my home and do supper and everything it was like 8.30-9, and as a person living alone you don’t have the time for cooking you know, so whatever, if you have like 2 eggs you scramble them and eat them you know. So, Krishna consciousness helped me actually maintain the discipline. The principles I believed in, Krishna consciousness actually helps you to implement that, you know, because I am sure that everybody in society they want to follow this tradition they want to follow these good habits you know but Krishna consciousness is the mould which actually helps you to attain this. So, it made it possible like here I am waking up every day four o’clock

in the morning, I do meditation, it helps me to clear my mind and there is vegan food which is fresh made food. (Interview 6: Appendix 1)

Others reported similar experiences by stating that too ‘little association’ resulted in slipping back while ‘staying close length with the community’ served and continues to serve as an encouragement for Krishna diet and other practices. But is a physical closeness really enough to keep one in the ‘*mould*’ for a long time?

To understand how Krishna Consciousness as a mould works toward the stabilisation of practices and through it the community itself, it is helpful to study how different types of eco-communities survive. Close association alone does not necessarily lead to coherent pro-environmental behaviour in all intentional communities. Researching in an eco-community on the Devon/Dorset border, Evans (2010: 41) found that community members negotiated their lives by moving freely between attachment to and detachment from the group. In communal practice, everything was set to follow and represent sustainability (plant-based diet, permaculture, alternative energy, etc.), but individuals carried on with their personal desires when not in the company of other residents. Evans (2010: 43)

witnessed and was treated to tales of residents sneaking into their bedrooms with a pork pie or takeaway [...]. Similarly, DVD players, hair straighteners, hi-fi systems, televisions and even game consoles were ubiquitous at BWC. Of course, these items were never present in shared, communal, public or visible areas where they would serve to pollute the categorical enactment of sustainable living [...]. Most notably, [...] virtually every resident owned a car in order to ‘travel back’ and away from the BWC community.

While the above is an isolated case, the literature informs us of the failure and ultimate collapse of most eco-initiatives (Christian, 2003: 2-13). Jackson claims (2009, 151) that secular communities seem ‘less resistant to the incursions of consumerism’, and I put forward that spiritual ones do better if and when spirituality works as a unifying force and a measuring stick in the group. It is possible that the commonly shared spiritual

ethos in the Krishna communities is a key contributor for sustaining practice and the communities themselves. Devotees believe this by declaring their common spirituality to be the glue and the foundation to cement and hold the community together. While Evans describes the above community to be emotionally bound, their shared 'morality' does not prove sufficient to create a coherent community of practice while a strong individualism is maintained. Fluctuation of members is high, with most of them leaving the community before a period of two years. In contrast, fluctuation on the Krishna farms is very low, and Krishna practice shows systemic coherence across space and time. Strict regulatory measures may be one source of this coherence, but the major key perhaps lies in the consequent application of an underlying faith system – Krishna spirituality, ethics and beliefs – to be followed and consulted as a yardstick. This was pointed out by several of the devotees who also use consistency as an educational principle that can only make Krishna lifestyle a genuine and attractive path to follow. Devotees claim that environmental values alone cannot hold communities together, and it is Krishna spirituality that keeps theirs alive. It is perhaps in this sense that the spatial and temporal association with like-minded believers (sharing the same philosophy, worldview and beliefs) proves so helpful in maintaining sustainable practices consistently and without decay. Interestingly, a high turnover rate was recorded by Carroll (2004: 126) in studying monastic eco-communities of Catholic origin in North America. This, again, may be contributable to the lack of a coherent philosophy that points beyond generic spiritual values to concrete, practical and homogeneous practices concerning the environment. Arguably, this ecological coherency is missing from the Catholic Church.

However, there is not enough academic evidence to understand the nature of survival in different types of intentional communities. Further research is needed to explore

differences and similarities of eco-cultures in terms of the failure or success rate of their survival. Apart from a homogeneous set of spiritual standards, other organisational factors may have contributed to the longevity of ISKCON's sixty-five eco-communities. First of all, these communities are self-sustaining and not dependent on external government funding. A strong spiritual motivation keeps devotees and sympathisers working and sponsoring the cause. A wide social network, one of the chief cornerstones of Sustainability Transitions research (Seyfang et al., 2010: 5), supports the communities in pursuing their spiritual and ecological goals. Second, with half a century of experimentation behind ISKCON as an organisation, newly established farm communities have an already set pattern to follow in community building. An extensive internal network is available to help fledgling communities financially and practically. Third, over the past fifty years, ISKCON has successfully steered its institutional pattern from a new religious movement to an environmental movement which may be presented as part of a wider social endeavour to fight against climate change. ISKCON managed this shift by keeping its radical spirituality internally while turning to the outside world with a newly adopted outreach strategy. Devotees are unanimously and explicitly aware of this shift which is clearly manifest in their missionary approaches as well as the media representations about the organisation. While in previous decades media presented ISCKON as a cult and highlighted issues of brain washing and organisational, social problems, today this type of approach has faded. Instead, food sharing programmes (European Union), celebrity involvement (Paul McCartney Meat-free Mondays, Sex Pistols etc.), compassion and ecological concerns take the lead.

Indeed, findings reveal that perseverance characterises the ecological service provided by community members. Parasuram das, for example, began his waste management

programme at a London restaurant in Soho thirty years ago. Since then he has been involved with food sharing activities. For several years he has been leading the London programme on a daily basis. There is very little fluctuation if any in his service group. Through the work of his charity Food for All, in alliance with similar organisations and celebrities, the message of a more sustainable diet and simplicity is carried to thousands of people every year. But Parasuram's Food for All is not the only food sharing organisation within ISKCON. Across continents, millions of children and adults are provided spiritually served meals by ISKCON's Food for Life and its affiliate charities. The sharing of vegetarian food – coupled with messages of love and devotion, simplicity, well-being and contentment – is one of the main missionary activities of the global organisation. Through this service, food and food practices leave the internal circles of Krishna communities and travel to external locations through service and co-operation, representing an alternative economical system.

Yet there is another innovative way to share more sustainable practices with the outside world: to host them on Krishna eco-farms. Healthy as it is for farm-dwellers, the privilege of living on an eco-farm is not available to most people. The ecological education provided in the form of eco-tours in two of the three visited communities is a working example of how practices may be shared at a large-scale level. Bhaktivedanta Manor and the Krishna Valley together host some 300,000 visitors annually. Many of these visitors pay a daily fee for the eco-tour, which provides an income to maintain the communities and their programmes without financial strains. These guests learn about pro-environmental lifestyle practices without having to embrace Krishna philosophy and the belief system. Visitors enjoy spending a day in the communities, appreciate the learning arrangement and the vegetarian food. Considering the number of ISKCON's eco-farms globally, this achievement is worth noting for Sustainability

Transitions research. Another important point to raise concerns the Sustainability Transitions concept of ‘niche replication’. According to the theory, niches which prove successful for sustainability need to be analysed for possibilities of diffusion through niche replication. However, in the Hare Krishna case this may not be necessary, given that the practice (Social Practice Theory’s central interest) shows ability of diffusion through ways other than group replication. Krishna vegetarianism is able to travel through a remarkable outreach scheme which attracts people to the community from the outside. These people, apart from paying for the ecological lessons, also carry them home and disseminate them in circles where food and food practices are not sustainable.

Presenting Krishna eco-farms as exemplary, viable alternatives, is important as the practices they maintain are perceived by some as the only way out of the current societal turmoil. In Jackson’s approach (2009: 152-153) society is set in a way to discourage rather than encourage more sustainable behaviour. In a society where even “highly motivated individuals experience conflict as they attempt to escape consumerism”, Jackson envisions a chance for progress in the ‘construction of credible alternatives’ (ibid. 193). And although the author visualises these alternatives to cut across the entire society in the form of reinvesting in common goods and services, he also refers to examples of local community endeavours where the proposed commons already form part of the lived experience (ibid. 148-151). To Jackson, individual or community-based behaviours need to be encouraged and enabled by structural changes at system level, otherwise the chances of infusing good ecological and economic practice into wider society are negligible (ibid. 153).

In agreement with the above, Social Practice Theory scholars criticise policy intervention that targets individual behaviour and propose instead the necessity of

targeting social practices. Encouraging social ties with communities of sustainable practice is one of the arrangements that a Social Practice Theory approach finds meaningful in instigating change. But the question still remains: how far can change reach without the entire restructuring of systems of provision, as suggested by Jackson and cognate approaches described in Chapter 2. In the next section I visit this question by presenting Hare Krishna food practices in their competition against dominant dietary trends. This competition is global, so the unit of analysis now shifts to the entire world.

Making Sense of Large Phenomena: Competing Diets

Counter-cultural as it is in terms of modern capitalist society, the Hare Krishna movement aligned itself with traditional Indian cultures and practices. While counter-culture is referenced by some as the very commendable attribute that makes spiritual eco-communities exemplary cases (Carroll, 2004: 166), others argue that by taking various forms, it may hinder social influence for sustainability (Lasch, 1978: 4; Taylor, 1989: 508). ISKCON's counter-culture may have led many, fascinated by the idea of Easternisation, to find shelter under the flagship of the faith, but some of the visited communities, mostly outsiders, expressed their opinion otherwise. Issues of dress, naming, gender relations, admiration of the holy soil, and Indian dishes were referenced as hindrances for wider uptake. At the same time, I observed among members an openness to change institutional attitudes by adjusting them to contemporary needs.

From a transitional viewpoint, the question of membership growth in a religious institution becomes less important than the social impact ISKCON can make through mobilising its ecological platforms. In Social Practice Theory's view, instead of

(financially) empowering a community of more sustainable practices, it may be more feasible to empower less sustainable communities to familiarise themselves with these practices through social connections (Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012: 162). Thus, central to the case is not simply the growth and replication of the niche, but the translation into society of what Krishna believers do (practice) for the environment. In this sense, rather than a religious movement, it is possible to see ISCKON as part of a transformative social movement that advocates sustainability through compassionate and ethical resource management and alternative diets. As stated before, the Hare Krishnas are not alone in their fight against mainstream dietary practices. Framing their work as a social endeavour allows us to see ISKCON within a wider range of activist organisations that campaign for less-meat solutions on grounds of compassion, health and the environment. Below I briefly assess how the eco-spiritual practices of the Hare Krishna community play their translational role in this broad social activity.

Different ontological assumptions have led theorists of social practice in different methodological directions in terms of how (if at all) scaling-up considerations may be made. How can large phenomena be explained from a few localised cases scrutinised from a practice-based perspective? – There are specific theoretical answers and methodological tools offered for that (Nicolini, 2017: 111), among which my attention is drawn to Elizabeth Shove's scholarly works and to authors following or contributing to this body of literature (e.g. Shove and Spurling, 2013). Shove has shown special interest in sustainable practices and climate change. Her way of making sense of large phenomena, as described by Nicolini (2017: 111), is to

attribute a collective name to a number of individual instances and treat the resulting epistemic object as quasi-entity: for example, the 'macro practice' or 'practical regime' of showering, shopping in supermarkets, washing, teaching, cycling [...] The critical reflexive step is to refrain from granting such quasi-entities direct causal power. Growth, competition and disappearance must also

be explained by reference to specific events, local conditions and ordinary practices. This manoeuvre [...] lends itself to studying the relative success of practices in terms of competition for practitioners (their time and attention) and other resources ‘consumed’ by the practice. [...] The approach provides an alternative, practice-based explanation of the process of ‘diffusion’ and how local innovations turn into large-scale phenomena. [...] By the same token, the approach also allows us to reason in terms of alliances, mutual support between practices and their components and even competitive appropriation.

Thus, taking vegetarianism (or less-meat diets) and dominant meat-based diets as quasi-entities, a Social Practice Theory approach sees them as competing (bundles of) practices in the wide social arena. Likewise, it is also possible to frame other eco-farm practices as parts of a wider competition in which they settle and evolve. Oxen-based versus tractor-based labour is one such example. In the chosen methodology, competition of practices may be evaluated through first-hand empirical findings and secondary data. Such secondary data may be obtained by scrutinising supermarkets shelves, visiting the website of a COP agenda, engaging with social media, or studying statistical and academic articles, to name a few. I now turn to such sources in a speculative approach to represent the competition of diets and its possible outcome.

Hare Krishna food looks practically identical all over the world, with little variation only in the type of fat (oil or ghee) or spices (hot or not) used. Historically, this food and even the way of serving it – a wide variety of small portions on a single plate – has not changed significantly over centuries. However long and far the elements of Krishna diet travel, when they land in other Krishna communities, they tend not to evolve. Watching fifty-year-old video recordings of Srila Prabhupada’s dishes in the United States or India, and today’s servings in the European settings, the food is found to be the same: rice, cooked vegetables, lentils, chickpeas or beans, and Krishna sweets made from milk and sugar. Garlic, onion or mushrooms have always been excluded from community meals. Their use is restricted. Even when food is used for sharing, these items, should they be donated, are exchanged or otherwise excluded from the offer.

While local, European types of dishes are not prohibited, they are rarely used in European Krishna communities, and must always be vegetarian. It is only the question of milk and dairy products that currently show ambiguity in terms of advisability in the communities. However, because of the strong belief in cow protection practices and the spiritual and medical advantages of milk, a 'ban' on dairy is very unlikely to take place in the global Krishna community. Some other items may turn into healthier or less healthy varieties (e.g. brown rice, white rice, wholemeal flour, refined flour, honey, sugar), but it is improbable if not impossible for meat to appear in Krishna diet. This would mean the termination of a belief system that is centred around vegetarianism and spiritually and ethically motivated food practices. As such, Krishna food practices show durability, a propensity which makes these practices interesting objects of inquiry in the field of social practices and their transitions.

As referenced earlier on, several devotees mentioned that their vegetarian practice became stable after accepting Krishna spirituality as a leading principle in their lives. Furthermore, secondary data from the United State shows that disillusioned members – 100 % of respondents – continued adhering to the faith and its practices after leaving ISKCON (Rochford, 2007: 165). Further research could only confirm if this is a global phenomenon, but from the few examples I encountered it appears that vegetarianism, before all other practices, leaves a lasting impression on ex-community members.

In contrast, food practices in the outside world, in one's own lifetime as well as on national scales, appear to be susceptible to change as raw materials and preparation competences travel, and rules of health or other discourses open way for accompanied actions. These changes are not only minor variations, but sometimes radical modifications influenced by celebrities (e.g. Jamie Oliver, Linda McCartney) or

‘fantasies’ geared and negotiated by the media and/or lobby interests (red meat hurts but white meat gives masculinity, strength, protein and nutrition).

Socially, meat consumption is associated with proper meals (Sunday dinner), growth and health (body building protein), celebration (killing the fatted calf), prosperity (a chicken in every pot), and gender (real men do not eat quiche) (Kenyon and Barker, 1998; Ruby, 2012). In their analysis of ‘professional’ dietary counsels in *Men’s Health*, Cook, Russell and Barker (2014) quote the following statements from the magazine: “Man Food Special. Why steak + wine = muscle”. “Boost your levels of sex and happiness hormones with a meat-feast pizza”. “Prime Cuts: It is the ultimate man food”. “Few meats have the same lady-killing cachet as a beautifully prepared fillet steak”, and so forth.

Notwithstanding an open access knowledge about the increasing health risk these items put on human health, the demand for them is only decreasing slowly – if at all – in some western countries, while largely increasing in less developed regions (WHO, 2016; OECD/FAO, 2017).

The constraining power of eating habits provide a key point to discuss here. “Old habits die hard” – claims a literature analysing the psychological effects of behavioural automaticity (Walker, Thomas and Verplanken, 2014). In this article, the authors examine the travel habits of WWF workers during the period of their relocation from London. Although the circumstances were favourable for cycling, which was one of the reasons for moving, travel habits did not disappear abruptly while strength for the new mode grew concurrently. “This demonstrates that even when overt behavior changes during a transition event, the underlying behavioral automaticity does not disappear immediately. Rather, there is a period during which habit for the new

behavior becomes established and habit for the old behavior decays” (ibid. 1089). By application, habitual factors of eating need also to be considered when issues of health and sustainability are promoted or analysed. In line with this, an article by Tim Lang and Rebecca Wells (2015) explains why ‘Big Food’ cannot sort out climate change – it is locked into an unsustainable food system, ‘hooked’ together with its consumers who got ‘used to’ what this globalised food system offers through two of its most responsible actors: supermarkets and factory farms. No wonder, claim the authors, that as global ‘tastes change’, climate change policy remains quiet about dietary choices, as “tackling food emissions means tackling consumers”. Hence, while food is a major factor driving climate change, it ‘barely gets a mention’ in the political realm. Both food regime and everyday practice seem to be locked in a status quo engineered and favoured by the meat industry and allied political and economic interests. Related Social Practice Theory literature (Watson, 2013: 124) has conceptualised this inertia one step further by a recognition of ‘systemic sticking points’ (obstacles, barriers for practice) to be the fabrication of regime actors rather than consumer-side idiosyncrasies. In cycling, for example, concerns for distance and safety may appear to be personal arguments against taking up this mode of travel. But in truth these concerns are only constructed socially, in competition with cars and in a world ‘reshaped around cars’. Safety would not be a problem if cyclists had their own routes, and it is only by having to share main roads with cars that the latter are announced twenty-times safer than bicycles. Likewise, a good number of dietary problems would be non-existent if systemic sticking points did not channel consumers into meat-based dietary practices.

The competition of diets gets more complicated by the fact that these practices tend to compete in bundles which condition their security and power. Apart from the act of eating, the combat extends to a competition of spaces and technologies where

urbanisation and fuel-dependency become the bedrock for meat-based practices, while a close connection with land and manual labour are becoming extinct by default.

From a Social Practice Theory point of view, intervention targeting individual behaviour cannot successfully change citizens' behaviour because of the latter's dependency on social arrangements rather than rational choice (Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012: 162). Or in Jackson's words:

Urging people to act on CO₂ to insulate their homes, turn down their thermostat, put on a jumper, drive a little less, walk a little more, holiday at home, buy locally produced goods (and so on) will either go unheard or be rejected as manipulation for as long as all the messages about high-street consumption point in the opposite direction. (2009: 153)

At present, the size and number of poultry farms are rapidly growing worldwide. To take India as an example of 'transitioning' countries, an article on FAO's website (Mehta and Nambiar, 2005: 69) claims that in the country "poultry industry represents a major success story. While agricultural production has been rising at the rate around 2 percent per annum over the past two to three decades, poultry production has been rising at the rate of around 8 percent per annum, with an annual turnover of US\$ 7 500 million." Since the year of this statement, supply has been steadily increasing. According to USDA's online report,

India's broiler production for 2017 is projected to increase by approximately seven percent to 4.5 million tons on increasing demand from the growing middle class. The demand for processed chicken meat is projected to grow between 15 to 20 percent per year. Layer production for 2017 is forecast at 84 billion eggs, up five percent from last year. (India: Poultry and Poultry Products Annual 2016: 1).

Considering the above statistics, even a tipping point in meat production seems to be an impossible target to reach. At the same time, spaces and technologies also compete for colonising practice, making bundled up practices harder to break. Urbanization, a phenomenon largely held responsible for growing meat demand, is projected to

increase in the following decades (WHO, 2016). Presently, urban lifestyle is largely connected to fast food and solitary eating habits, while the practice of eating together is eroding (e.g. Yates and Warde, 2017). The growing food demand is met by ‘revolutionary’ practices fabricated and bequeathed to us by schemes such as the ‘green revolution’ and ‘livestock revolution’. These revolutionary practices, homogenizing monocultures, are geared to produce quantity at the expense of quality. Even some of the more sustainable methods, such as precision agriculture (satellite farming) for example, are based upon the principles of monocultural food production. Long term sustainability is sacrificed for short term solutions. While there may be enough food for everybody’s need, as the Hare Krishna people propose, greed is not in the vocabulary of a new economic system which calls small beautiful. If small is beautiful (Schumacher, 1973), the question is if the current economic system – based on unlimited, continuous growth, and fossil fuel – is able to sustain such a transition.

Thus, the Hare Krishna movement, together with numerous other organisations occupying similar positions, seem to fight an impossible battle against the double lock-ins or sticking points of everyday habits and system-side installations. Interestingly however, at least in the United Kingdom, the overall number of vegetarians, vegans and respective businesses is growing concurrently with a global increase in meat demand. This trend is becoming visible via social media, organisational reports, animal sanctuaries, restaurants, and a widening range of vegetarian and vegan items offered by supermarkets, universities, pubs, cafes and other food providers. In some countries, such as the United States, the per capita demand for meat products may have already started to decline (conflicting data available), but most parts of the world are facing a solid increase in meat consumption. Thus, it remains to be seen whether contingencies or exogenous forces can reverse these trends for a better future. Scandals, epidemic

outbreaks, celebrities and new technologies (e.g. laboratory meat) could steer the status quo unexpectedly. But deliberate actions, if not targeted at regime-level agents, are not capable to rearrange the map of provision and consumption at a global level. Regardless of the numerous initiatives and innovations to promote a reduction in meat intake, both the overall and per capita consumption rate is radically growing and is projected to remain that way. As stated in the Introduction, the problematized phenomenon of this research is that despite a growing awareness about the ills of meat production, per capita demand is also on the increase. Despite the united and broadly extended work of civil society groups, churches, online advocacy movements towards a less-meat society, customer demand for meat is growing. In such circumstances, it would be a tall order to predict how the united efforts of meat-free communities could break through the inertia represented across practices and system. In a business-as-usual scenario, sticking points for upcoming decades will prevent the global uptake of vegetarianism despite the combined efforts of the Hare Krishna movement and other advocacy organisations. In the meantime, a steadily but less intensively growing vegetarianism may positively impact the prosperity and well-being of local communities, families and individual actors.

CHAPTER 9. CONCLUSIONS

I have chosen a Social Practice Theory approach to follow food and food practices in three Hare Krishna communities. One of the communities – Karuna Bhavan in Lesmahagow, Scotland – is primarily a monastic retreat with strong spiritual and missionary endeavours. The other British community near Watford, London – Bhaktivedanta Manor – runs an extensive food sharing programme and introduced large-scale eco-tourism. The Manor has a broad social network in support of its ecological activities. The third community – the Hungarian Krishna Valley – is known for maintaining an entire eco-village. The latter has achieved significant standards in re-introducing bio-diversity, and de-technologising labour and lifestyle. The special characteristics of these farms helped to understand and describe how Hare Krishna eco-farms are maintained in Europe. Despite all idiosyncrasies, however, there is an underlying spirituality to motivate everyday practices which appear to be identical in all these groups. This homogeneity in eating, service, sharing, spirituality and simplicity makes Hare Krishna practices remarkable objects of research.

To tease out meaning together with participants, I used ethnographic research methods of observation, participation and interviewing. The Social Practice Theory framework enabled me to scrutinise practices closely and allow time for contemplation and bottom-up theorising. Apart from close-up investigations of Krishna dietary and food practices, Social Practice Theory also allowed for understanding them as wider entities (less-meat practices) and juxtapose them with their dominant counterparts (meat-based practices). From the outset, I was prepared for unexpected, emergent data to steer the flow of investigations, the practical details of which I describe in Chapter 3.

In brief, I worked several weeks as a volunteer on the farms, took part in outreach events, food preparation, and food sharing programmes. By becoming friends with Hare Krishna devotees – while also keeping a balanced distance -, and spending considerable time in their circle, I obtained insights that would have otherwise not been possible. Conundrums and ambiguities were thus uncovered, but more importantly, the intricacy and subtlety of the lived experience revealed insightful points about spiritually induced human agency for stabilisation and change. Below I summarise the most prominent findings of this work. The major findings and the conclusive theses drawn from them are also illustrated in the visual inserted on the last page of the thesis (Appendix 4: Picture 55).

Durability

I have demonstrated that the underlying stimuli for more sustainable practices in Hare Krishna farm communities derive from symbolic and spiritual sources. All other components of the food practices and the bundles thereof are subordinate to Krishna spirituality. As depicted in the empirical chapters, even the material elements and spatial arrangements of the communities are spiritually galvanised. For example, the great number of shrines constructed all over the farm areas provide material and symbolic incentives for contemplation, which – in Krishna circles – is always already nourished by a unique cosmology supporting vegetarianism and a nature-based lifestyle. Another example could be the often-mentioned lack of television sets on the farms, which results in different complexes of practices sequenced differently by temporal possibilities and constraints. To be more precise: while many in the outside world may be watching programmes several hours a day, freed Hare Krishna time needs to be colonised by non-similar practices, the availability of which is limited by

both temporal and spatial arrangements. Because such practices are virtually always connected to an ongoing, spiritual fascination with food (planting, offering, sharing, reading, conversing), it is possible to conceive Krishna dieting as a dominant project for community members. Desk-based studies and secondary data (e.g. video archives) reveal that the spirituality and appearance of Krishna prasadam is effectively identical all over the world, manifesting little variation over space and time. Krishna diet, for its spiritual attributes, appears to be an unmovable, stable practice, appealing to insiders and outsiders alike. Consequently, similar levels of fascination may well be expected around urban communities (temples and restaurants) as on eco-farms. It may be the case that even ex-community members carry on practicing vegetarianism after officially severing ties with ISKCON. Thus, Hare Krishna diet becomes a durable ethos and practice – both as entity and as performance – for millions of members and sympathisers all over the world.

The apparent durability of Krishna vegetarianism is attributable to the spiritual factors as main practice motivators. I proposed that not only does a spiritual conversion results in radical change, but that change may also be more long-lasting than otherwise. Community members testify that their meat-free diet stabilised after embracing spirituality and/or joining the community, while it was sporadic before.

Taking this thought forward from a wider transitional perspective, individual persistence driven by spirituality seems to impact the longevity and success of Hare Krishna farm communities. They, too, show durability which makes them interesting object of socio-ecological research. It is suggested that spiritual communities are prominent examples of a practical simplicity which exemplifies a ‘prosperity without growth’ (Jackson, 2009: 151). Although spirituality may not appeal to masses of society, eco-spiritual communities which are durable may serve as stable and coherent

representatives of sustainability. None of the three eco-communities I visited show signs of decay. Spirituality is woven into every practice in the communities, and it seems to have a tenacious grip on believers. Spiritual motivation is a radical contributor to performance, and in the Krishna communities it is coupled with an attribute that may play an important part in continuity: homogeneity.

By using the concept of ‘plug-ins’, I have shown that spiritual adherents have more dietary motives or plug-ins to ‘download’ and act upon than non-spiritual consumers. In the case of Hare Krishna eco-communities, conversion, spiritual teachings and beliefs, ethical views, community support, as well as the practical phases of the whole food cycle, all work together to stabilise and maintain vegetarian practices which form an entire bundle. I showed that spirituality works as the main motivational factor for vegetarianism in Hare Krishna circles, and that it strongly contributes to the endurance of the practice at both individual and community levels. This brings human agency to the forefront when Hare Krishna practice is scrutinised.

Spiritual Community of Environmental Practice

Besides durable practices, the longevity of Krishna farm communities also makes these eco-farms interesting objects of Sustainability Transitions research. Devotees consistently emphasise that spirituality is the mould and glue that holds the community together. However, not all spiritual eco-communities succeed as well as Hare Krishna farms do. There is very little evidence in the literature on eco-communities to suggest why some communities are more successful than others. The literature claims that spiritual initiatives succeed more than secular ones (Jackson, 2009: 151), but there is little empirical evidence to support this claim. The three communities studied are

homogeneous in their spirituality, and there is consistency in the everyday enactment of their spiritually driven practices. Community members are aware of this consistency and argue that it is a significant means in the education of the next generations. I further argue that religious or spiritual consistency creates unity, or at least a set of standards, a measure-stick, against which all issues and decisions can be weighed.

Another possible determinant may be the fact that ISKCON's eco-communities do not lean on – often precarious – governmental support for their existence. These farm communities are formed out of an organisation which is thoroughly functional, and which already owns a network of Hare Krishna farm communities. The spiritual and financial support across these communities makes experimenting a less uncertain activity than it is probably the case for most intentional communities. While eco-communities fail to survive in large numbers (Christian, 2003: 2-13), none of the sixty-five eco-farms in the ISKCON movement considers closing. There is little deviation in Krishna lifestyle across the global organisation. It is likely that a strong spiritual and practical coherency plays into the durability of ISKCON's farm communities.

Besides the evident longevity of ISKCON's sixty-five eco-farms, it is their ecological achievements that makes them exemplary cases for Sustainability Transitions research. A profound system of eco-tourism established in two of the three communities (Bhaktivedanta Manor and Hungarian Krishna Valley) largely contributes to the education of students and adults who pay an estimated 300,000 visits every year. These visits provide opportunities to demonstrate more sustainable practices in a natural environment. Through the eco-tourism programme Hare Krishna members present an alternative set of practices which encourage demand-side resource reductions via sustainable agriculture, de-technologising, meat-free (less-meat) eating, and a close connectivity with nature. Visitors need not become followers of Krishna to embrace

some of the alternatives demonstrated by the eco-tours. As such, it is not the replication potential of the farms, but that of the practices which becomes particularly relevant for evaluating diffusion potentials. Pro-environmental practices appear to travel out freely and seamlessly of community circles. The non-religious, natural environment makes mingling and idea exchange an easy, interesting and straightforward project for visitors. This becomes especially significant for a practice approach. Dominant dietary standards remain very far from sustainable measures, yet the barriers between them appear to fade through the ecological education offered by Krishna communities, which is based on interesting entertainment such as bullock-ride, cow-feeding and eating together. For a few hours, the gap between sustainable and unsustainable dietary practices are bridged over through Hare Krishna service, an experience which may leave lasting impressions in partakers' minds, and serve as an incremental step toward potential change.

Hare Krishna farm communities – though not without ambiguities – prove to be exemplary in that they demonstrate a lifestyle practice that is echoed in the concepts of the new economics, de-growth and akin perspectives emphasising the importance of intrinsic values over materialistic ones and consumerism. To the best of my knowledge, no literature has identified these similarities with the named scholarly fields. The contemporary significance of this connection lies in its transitional aspect. A sizeable body of literature, including works of the above schools, now claims that without an entire system change in the current economic and social order, and without bottom-up resource reductions, a global Sustainability Transitions is simply not imaginable. Despite all the pitfalls illustrated in this thesis, the Hare Krishna farm communities provide practical alternatives and inspirations to follow and study the suggested properties of frugality, simplicity, conviviality, service and sharing. By introducing

eco-tourism an exemplary educational model has been established to spread these alternatives outside the community walls. Substantial action has also been taken towards neutralising the influences of the current economic order by de-technologizing energy and labour, and experimenting with independent ways of sustenance (including food preservation and local money schemes).

Voluntary Simplicity

A significant set of findings was the Krishna communities' inclination to promote a philosophy of 'simple living'. Borrowed from founder Srila Prabhupada's commentaries on ancient scriptures, the motto of the movement reflects a whole range of lifestyle principles, similar to those Gandhi advocated. Based on a Vedic Hindu understanding, a creationist worldview entails a close connectivity with nature and the spiritual traits of austerity, frugality, simplicity, conviviality and sharing. Interestingly, as stressed before, these properties seem to dovetail with what the so-called new economics and de-growth theorists depict in their postulations. Like Schumacher's tenet about small as beautiful, these schools emphasise the importance of demand-side reductions and the need for an entire system shift in the current economic system if a system-wide sustainability transition is to be realised. Juxtaposing Jackson's (2009) theory with empirical findings, the Hare Krishna farm communities proved exemplary cases for an alternative prosperity maintained without growth. The author's seminal work conceptualises society's great problem in a consumerism which is not solely or necessarily a result of wilful consumer choice. More than anything, Jackson holds the social structure responsible for encouraging and constraining people to remain in the vicious circle of high-street spending. Competition, self-expression, and insatiable desires may leave us in the despondency of consumerism, while sustainable living is

nearly impossible to reach even for the most motivated actors. An economics based on unlimited growth will not encourage co-operation, sharing, contentment, frugality, and simplicity of practice. Yet – Jackson suggest – it is exactly these factors that may lead to prosperity and the maintenance of other intrinsic values such as belonging, self-acceptance and affiliation. All of these proposed values are manifest in Hare Krishna eco-farms, thus making the community a living example to frame prosperity and sustainability transitions from an alternative angle. More than just bringing about personal well-being, a prosperity without growth is less CO₂ intensive, hence understanding Krishna simplicity as a transitory and experimental niche is increasingly significant for Sustainability Transitions.

Voluntary simplicity cuts across all spheres of the Hare Krishna lived experience. In terms of food practices, it is an underlying condition in food production, gardening, preparation and eating. Serving and sharing food, especially when supermarket waste is recycled or rescued, is a notable example of simplification. Devotees also simplify labour, technology, land cultivation, and leisure. One remarkable example is opting out of the national electric grid, and even of a centralised solar well in the Hungarian Krishna Valley, to be replaced by individually installed, manual solutions. In my observation, Krishna de-technologising is a genuine aim for long-term sustainability, a vision which values quality and nature over quantity, speed and greed. In terms of mobility, cars are few, simple and cheap, and even prohibited to be owned by members in one of the three locations. In the three localised contexts, a unanimous endeavour was apparent to follow simplicity across all lifestyle practices. However, this summary needs also to remember shortcomings and ambiguities in the visited communities.

Ambiguities

Despite an overarching ethos of simplicity, compromise creeps in by the use of supermarket dairy in Karuna Bhavan (Scotland), for example, or intensive tractor usage in the Hungarian Krishna Valley where simplicity and de-technologizing are promoted the most. The insemination of cows, which is now discontinued in Bhaktivedanta Manor, but still practiced in the Krishna Valley, may also raise questions about eco-spiritual consistency. In regard to some other practices, a strong cultural bias and gender segregation obscure simplicity and makes it somewhat complicated to follow. Although shifting institutional patterns presents ISKCON to the outside world as an ecological movement meeting and serving the interests of contemporary society, previous customs still prevail to a degree. Organisational patterns and corresponding practices may rearrange configurations for practices to travel seamlessly or less seamlessly into new locations. While shifts in these patterns seem to have created a conducive environment for diffusion, some practices, based on different patterns, still appear to hinder wider uptake in western societies. This is manifest in community dining where – in its religious setting – men and women sit apart, and talking and socialising is not expressly encouraged. Rather, eating is an event for quiet contemplation and personal development, with isolated devotees' backs often turned upon the rest of the community if required by moments of spiritual engagement (e.g. pre-chanting meditation). This attitude too is an outcome of the philosophy that teaches adherents to conceive of eating as a time to reverence prasadam – and what is connected to it – rather than socialising. Srila Prabhupada is reported to have given some bananas or other food items to visitors to send them on their way, and sit at his own plate to – in slow contemplation – consume the spiritual food.³⁰ This type of 'slow food',

³⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v92DggbjRB8>

contemplative eating, and detachment, hardly fulfils the requirements of conviviality in eating together. In my observation, the conviviality of eating together in Krishna circles is primarily experienced in sharing and outreach programmes and other non-official settings where devotee behaviour is not religiously regulated. In its official settings, Hare Krishna dining showed a remarkable lack of cordiality, setting boundaries rather than dissolving them. Of all the findings, this was the hardest to capture and register, as in my paradigmatic view eating together was always already a communal and sociable, convivial practice. Besides, my interviews and conversations also attested to this view, and it was only at a late phase of fieldwork that the conundrum got uncovered through raising questions about my observations in an email interview (Interview 33: Appendix 1).

Competition of Diets

Although strict lifestyle rules and counter-cultural attitudes may not appeal to outsiders, it is possible that they provide the spiritual glue for holding the community together. While ISKCON is a firmly established international community, its membership seems to have stopped growing over the past few decades.³¹ During the same period, however, increasing societal interest in environmental matters has prepared the way for the organisation to present itself as a pro-environmental group, a shift resulting in enhanced positive publicity. Framing ISKCON as an environmental rather than a religious movement allowed me to conceive of the organisation as part of a wider social endeavour united in advocacy for a less-meat diet. In alliance with NGOs such as Compassion in World Farming, movies such as *Cowspiracy*, books such as

³¹ Based on intuition and observation. No official data exist.

Farmageddon, a growing number of online communities and numerous other intermediaries, this social movement represents a sizeable army to campaign against (industrial) meat production and consumption. Though this demand-side activity shows incremental results in a changing range of supermarket offers, its power still proves inefficient to dislodge system-level institutions. This competition cannot settle unless vested market and political interests change course under the flagship of a systemic rearrangement of regimes of provision. I have expressed doubts about the possible outcome of this competition, but contingent and/or exogenous causes may steer the status quo towards change. For a Social Practice Theory approach, it is not possible to talk optimism while meat production and the factory farming scheme is on rapid expansion, simply because it gears the material arrangements into channels that favour meat eating practices. If reversing these trends is the aim, the question is what steps policy intervention can take while the factory farming scheme remains unchecked. In the section below I address this question in more detail.

Climate Policy Intervention

Theorists of social practice increasingly turn towards issues of climate change policy intervention. Although the role of multiple contingencies is stressed by practice analysts over a less favoured managerial ethos, policy-making trajectories are frequently sought and offered. In criticising interventionist approaches that target individual behaviour based on rational choices, Social Practice Theory scholars posit that successful change comes about by enabling practices and not by changing people's minds (e.g. Watson, 2013: 129) or even by nudging them into action (Hui, Schatzki and Shove, 2017: i). In case of food, although educational materials on healthy or low-carbon diets may play an important role in moving towards more sustainable practices,

they need to be combined with other policy methods to successfully influence lifestyle practices. Regulatory actions to control business and empower school programmes may be examples of how a less-meat diet can be supported by local authorities. But while we are informed of successful school programmes initiated by policy action, business interests appear to be harder to negotiate. If this remains so, Social Practice Theory has another resource to turn to when people's diet becomes the target of intervention. Instead of focusing on nudging individuals to shift their diet through incentives or knowledge-based communication, encouraging social connections with exemplary groups may yield better results. Social Practice Theory's advice to policy-makers is to identify communities of sustainable practice and make the practice available to others through social ties. If this involvement-based approach succeeds in recruiting a critical number of practitioners, these practitioners in turn may be able to influence production by shifting demands.

In a Social Practice Theory approach, if a holistic programme is not manageable, policy endeavours may need to make do with minor and incremental actions, which should not primarily and solely be communication-based. Crucially, Social Practice Theory offers insights in understanding the nature of practices – and problems – rather than in how to change or solve them. When sustainable or unsustainable practices come to view, what Social Practice Theory recommends is a diversification towards the sustainable end through creating the right conditions for them. Let necessary materials, meanings and competence be made available to the general public, and let practices and their bundles escalate as they will through the numerous interconnections of their elements and other related mediators. Drawn from Sustainability Transitions theories, encouragement is given to build new coalitions, partnerships and networks (Loorbach and Rotmans, 2010: 139) which make the conditions for sustainable practice possible.

In the end, Social Practice Theory scholars argue, the success of policy intervention depends on non-policy actors. As such, and because of the contingent nature of practices, policy is not about delivering ready-made goals, but about “moving towards always-moving targets”. Social Practice Theory’s basic aim is to discover and uncover, as far as possible, these always-moving targets of everyday life.

In terms of the Hare Krishna movement, findings show that encouraging social ties with community members may be one of policymaking’s minor and incremental actions. Outsiders visiting ISKCON’s eco-farms appreciate the vegetarian meal offered, and find the entire food cycle interesting. Cow protection presents an alternative way to re-connect with nature through de-technologizing labour and emotionally connecting to animals. Though there are opportunities to foster ongoing relationships by long-term volunteering, one-time encounters may also be beneficial for change. The conversion narratives recorded in the communities show that some people in society are disenchanted with the present economic and social order and are open to learn meaningful alternatives and practical solutions for their own and society’s ills. Others may already be searching for these solutions actively and purposefully. As individual transition to more sustainable practices often appear to be incremental, these one-time encounters may serve as milestones towards lifestyle change. In my evaluation, Hare Krishna eco-farms offer harmless activities and ways of learning for the advancement of pro-environmental practices. Despite ISKCON’s counter-cultural tendencies, my own experience and observations render the community safe for friendship cultivation.

One major advantage of encouraging social ties with ISKCON lies in the community’s longevity as an established institution which does not require governmental support for survival. At a time when the financial empowerment of grassroots movements becomes

increasingly challenging, ISKCON – not standing in the queue for sustainability funds – has long proven the genuineness of its environmental commitment. The visited communities' eco-tour programmes are especially noteworthy for effective sustainability education. The number of outsiders visiting these programmes is significant. Visitors receive sensory knowledge and illustration of an alternative prosperity, the practices of which they may later implement into their lives with or without embracing Hare Krishna beliefs.

Contributions

Sustainability Transitions and Social Practice Theory

The major concern of this thesis has been to present the significance of eco-spiritual agency for Sustainability Transitions research and theory building. The Hare Krishna communities provide a clear case where transitioning and practice stabilisation unfold independently of technological or market-based innovations. Innovation in the groups lies in the way lifestyle practices are simplified, de-technologised, and disseminated. Although not against the use of technology in a Luddite way, the main goal on the Krishna eco-farms is not to source energy demands through alternative solutions, but to consume less. Encouraging intrinsic values and co-operation rather than competition, Krishna believers fulfil the tenets of a new, stationary economics based on simplicity and prosperity rather than materialistic growth. I have presented Krishna spirituality as the main driver behind the communities' more sustainable practices. This raises questions and contributes to answers about what constitutes agency for change in the social world, and how it is perceived by Sustainability Transitions scholars.

In the literature review (Chapter 2) I detailed how Sustainability Transitions frameworks are organised around the primacy of technological development when modelling, analysing and instigating systemic change is at stake. Indeed, technology effectively played into historical transitions and it can today remap the entire infrastructure of energy supply. At the same time, rebound effects on the consumption side may encourage practitioners to spend what is gained through better resource management on even more energy-intensive services and products. An increasing demand for energy as well as meat calls consumerism and the dominant economic system into question. It points toward the application of a more extensive Sustainability Transitions framework which enables a dynamic treatment of agency in the research field. During the last decade, Sustainability Transitions frameworks have been criticised for their narrow understanding of agency, and the framework was gradually extended to include areas of social, political and cultural factors of Sustainability Transitions. However, the mediating potential of beliefs and worldviews have not been adequately addressed and included into the suggested framework. While emotion and spirituality became favoured topics of several areas of social research, the Sustainability Transitions literature has remained silent on these issues. Socio-psychological research has already identified correlations between worldviews and pro-environmental behaviours. As soon as everyday and end-user practices become objects of special interest for Sustainability Transitions research, spirituality and other worldviews will inevitably occupy a position in the approach.

Food practices, which are often related to spiritual or materialistic worldviews, are particularly under-researched in the field. This is surprising if we consider the amount of land and water usage connected to different dietary practices. The Hare Krishna case illustrates that – in this particular context – the spiritual factor occupies central position

as agency for change and practice stabilisation. The unique durability of spiritual practice must raise questions of agency for theorists of Sustainability Transitions as well as social practice. Both these areas acknowledge the multifaceted complexity of social change, yet for years have shown a remarkable bias towards emphasising the mediatory role of materials.

In contrast, strong spiritual motivation for sustainable food practices in Hare Krishna communities illustrates a case where human agency galvanised by of eco-spirituality supersedes the role of technology or market in Sustainability Transitions. I propose that worldview (e.g. spiritual or materialistic) is a key determinant for environmental practices, their durability, and diffusion. While some social theorists have proceeded so far as to argue for the necessity of an entire worldview shift before any systemic transition can take place, Sustainability Transitions research to date has remained silent on issues of worldviews as well as spiritual beliefs. Some scholars envisage a spiritual worldview shift as a necessary precondition for sustainability (Schumacher, 1972; Ikerd, 2016a; 2016b). Although they may not necessarily share this vision, theorists of Sustainability Transitions are also called to extend their perspectives towards the latent property of spirituality (and other worldviews) to better understand social phenomena and agency for change.

I do not deny the predominance of technological innovation (Sustainability Transitions) and material artefacts (Social Practice Theory) in specific contextual situations. What I propose is that in localised empirical contexts, particularly in settings where dominant values are questioned and countered, materiality may come subordinate to other underlying elements of practice. These underlying elements – which may often be related to how people view the world – are crucial to understand. Having presented the Hare Krishna case, I claim its spirituality to be the main stimulus for practice, without

which it could easily erode and decay. Practitioners manifest more agency here than in mainstream contextual settings where structural arrangements set the rules and win people – as ‘carriers’ – to meat-based dietary practices.

I have drawn on Social Practice Theory to better understand everyday practice by taking an exploratory approach. Social Practice Theory offers a useful methodology and framework to analyse practice stabilisation and decay. However, Social Practice Theory scholars tend to claim predominance for material artefacts in the process (e.g. Shove, 2012: 9). While I did not dismiss the significance of material culture, the Hare Krishna case offered a unique constellation where the practice elements of rules/beliefs proved to be dominating over other elements of practice. Through this understanding and presentation, I contribute to a very recent Social Practice Theory research agenda in acknowledging personal motivation as an inherent element of every social practice (Reckwitz, 2017: 120). I emphasise human agency and the importance of beliefs/worldviews which may motivate practitioners for enactment. This is a deviation from a generic Social Practice Theory approach, but also a call to consider worldview in practice theory research.

In echoing Jackson’s thought (2009: 152), it is almost impossible for some – even the most motivated – to act sustainably when the entire social structure is geared to encourage otherwise. It is in such social context that the Hare Krishnas succeed in counter-acting dominant trends, and it is a distinctive and homogeneous spirituality that motivates them to action. My findings demonstrate agency to be a dynamic property, the level and nature of which depends on the specificity of cases. Studying worldview offers crucial insights before we start evaluating people’s social world.

Identifying agencies requires revisiting assumptions and ontological bias, which makes it a challenging but important task to fulfil. At the same time, misidentifying agencies may lead to theoretical fallacies and misplaced policy interventions. Sustainability Transitions scholars, I suggest, need to reconsider their treatment of agency and structure, and perceive of them as dynamic realities that fold out differently in different social contexts. By trying to avoid the dualism of structure or agency, a proposed duality of the two may have led theorists to take these two properties in equal, or pre-set, proportion and not consider them further. The level and nature of agencies vary from case to case, and a static view on them may disable the heuristic flow and discovery of research. Likewise, Sustainability Transitions theorists need to reflect on a strong technological bias in a world where environmental research questions gradually shift towards demand-side reductions from optimal resource management. With an often-repeated new economics in view, this thesis offers a case to consider the role of spirituality – and worldviews in general – when a system-wide Sustainability Transitions is the object of theorising and research.

Contributions to the New Economics literature

As depicted throughout the preceding chapters, the Hare Krishna communities offer a case where collective lifestyle practices dovetail with the propositions of the New Economics and cognate bodies of literature. To date, this correlation has not been discovered, and the Hare Krishna lifestyle – to the best of my knowledge – has not been studied from this vantage point. A sharing economy (e.g. food, local money), simplicity and demand reductions are manifest in practices which occupy central stage in a body of literature which envisions social change through lifestyle-related and intrinsic values (e.g. belonging) rather than market and growth-based innovations. This is the second

major contribution of this thesis. The visited Krishna communities are exemplary in fulfilling some of the demand-side requirements put forward by scholars advocating radical systemic change as far as economics is concerned. Proponents of the new economics, de-growth, deep sustainability and related concepts advance the importance of revisiting current economic ideas such as unlimited growth, development and progress (Seyfang, 2009; D'Alisa, Demaria and Kallis, 2014: 43; Ikerd, 2016). These concepts argue for the demand-side, bottom-up significance of a different type of economy and society based on simplicity, frugality, service, co-operation and sharing. Combined with the theoretical concept of 'voluntary simplicity', Hare Krishna practices may be conceived of and explained in relation to an 'economy of tomorrow' (Jackson, 2016), and how that economy relates to unlimited growth, systemic change and Sustainability Transitions.

Eating simply, labouring simply, dressing simply and travelling simply means a less carbon-intensive lifestyle. But beyond this, an economy of tomorrow conceptualises voluntary simplicity together with intrinsic values such as self-acceptance, affiliation and belonging (Jackson, 2009: 148), and presents it as a precondition for systemic change (ibid). Thus, eco-spiritual simplicity draws attention to a specific perspective on societal transitions, which makes it an interesting subject for Sustainability Transitions research.

Further contributions

Apart from adding knowledge to the scientific fields of Sustainability Transitions, Social Practice Theory and the New Economics research, this work also contributes to the Ecocultures literature and the scientific study of New Religious Movements. The

Hare Krishna group (ISKCON) has been researched widely as a new religious movement. For decades, gender relations, child abuse and a variety of religious subjects have offered central topics for investigation (e.g. Rochford, 1982; 1985; 2007; Bromley and Shinn, 1988; Dein and Barlow, 2007; Schweig, 2004). Discovering a change in the institutional pattern of the organisation, in this thesis I framed it as a pro-environmental community rather than a solely religious movement. This approach adds to our understanding of ISKCON and opens new opportunities for researching spiritual communities, while it also invites other spiritual groups for interfaith dialogues on the environment.

Significantly for ecoculture research, I have proposed that change supported by spiritual conversion and eco-spiritual motivation may be more durable than where spirituality is absent. This durability may contribute to the longevity of Hare Krishna farm-communities, a longevity which is unique among intentional ecocultures (Christian, 2013). A radical, coherent and homogeneous spirituality as well as financial independence may be two of the important factors that enable Hare Krishna farms to survive. So far, little evidence has been published on why certain eco-communities succeed to survive, while others fail. In specific contexts, spirituality may or may not be instrumental in community survival, but very little has been said about questions of longevity in ecoculture research. This thesis is a contribution to a potential research agenda inquiring into eco-communal persistency from a spiritual perspective.

Summary of contributions

The following table provides a quick reference tool to the contributions described in this section. The major contributions, highlighted in grey, were made to three distinct yet related bodies of literature in that they all address issues of system-wide sustainability. In the table I give succinct descriptions of the current scientific positions

taken by a given body of literature (altogether five), and how this thesis contributes to that literature through additional knowledge and/or an alternative approach.

CONTRIBUTIONS

LITERATURE	RESENT POSITION	CONTRIBUTION
1. SUSTAINABILITY TRANSITIONS	Market and technological innovations are perceived as the predominant means toward transitions.	In contrast, I argue for more space for human agency in specific research contexts. Worldview is an important determinant to consider.
2. SOCIAL PRACTICE THEORY	The material element of practice is emphasized over human agency and motivation.	In contrast, I emphasise the significance of human motivation, which in some contexts (e.g. Hare Krishna) may overshadow other elements, including the material.
3. NEW ECONOMICS	This and cognate theoretical concepts have not presented Hare Krishna lifestyle as an example for their tenets.	I demonstrated that Hare Krishna communities offer an exemplary case for a “prosperity without growth”, simplicity and sharing.
4. NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS	The Hare Krishna movement has been studied almost exclusively as a new religious movement.	I presented the Hare Krishna movement as an environmental movement which is spiritually galvanised.
5. ECOCULTURES	No evidence is given why some eco-communities survive and others fail. It has not been asked if spiritual eco-communities do better, which types, and why?	Hare Krishna eco-communities seem to survive because of a homogeneous spirituality and a strong and financially independent organisational system.

Limitations and Future Research

This research has been conducted from a non-Hindu, European paradigm, which may have impacted the meaning-making process in a religious community of Indian origin. Visits to India could have made the subtlety of Hindu cultures clearer, and steered my perception of Krishna food differently.

Touching and milking cows made a difference for this work. Finding out how their temperatures differ and how their unique udders and teats require different treatment made significant impact on my understanding of Hare Krishna practice. Likewise, spending time in Indian communities could have modified the storyline of this thesis. To make up for this gap, however, and to avoid methodological individualism, I resolved to connect findings to literature and validate generalisations accordingly.

Out of the sixty-five Hare Krishna eco-farms I studied three in Europe which showed enough similarities to give a holistic account of the community's food practices. However, other farm communities in America or Africa could have provided further insights, and modified my overall understanding of Krishna food. This limitation can only be mitigated by more extensive research on Hare Krishna farms.

During data collection, I often felt the necessity to contact ex-community members to check if my readings and observations about their (unchanged) dietary practices were generally valid. These ex-members also shed further light on other important aspects, and organisational issues in particular. Within the scope of this investigation, however, I only managed to locate a few of these members. Similarly, my proposition about individual durability in practice, though supported by literature, is based upon a narrow dataset which needs quantitative confirmation.

Quantitative questions could also be raised about Krishna prasadam and how it is appreciated by believers who live outside the farm communities. Details of experiencing communal eating and conviviality (or its lack) in Hare Krishna homes could shed more light upon the subject of eating together, a theme of increasing contemporary interest.

This thesis has only problematised the quantity of meat produced and consumed, but its quality and the quality of food in general could also raise research questions. The use and cost of medicine and healthcare has an indirect impact on the environment, which is deemed highly significant (e.g. Keim, 2008). The vitality of mainstream food could be juxtaposed with its Hare Krishna alternative which is often locally sourced and produced in polycultural and more sustainable ways.

Another emerging area which could yield crucially significant findings is that of the intersection of Social Practice Theory and epigenetic research (Maller, 2017). Epigenetics is a medical field focusing on the environmental and lifestyle impacts made on the human body through gene activation or inactivation, and their potential transference through birth. Obesity, degenerative diseases, and specific socio-medical queries could be conducted on Krishna farms given the members homogeneous lifestyle and eating habits. With the rise of vegan followers within ISKCON, comparative studies could also be made to identify potential differences between the two diets and their wider relevance for the environment. To date I have been unable to locate any medical or health-related studies among Hare Krishna communities, which is surprising considering the number of publications concerning other spiritual groups such as the Seventh-day Adventist Christians (e.g. Kahn et al., 1984; Jacobsen, Knutsen and Fraser, 1998; Butler et al., 2007).

The theme of emotionally motivated practice may also inspire a range of questions in the field of connectivity with nature. Naming the cows, for example, and protecting nature on the basis of emotional spirituality offers opportunities of learning at a time when radical decline in humans' connectivity with nature is reflected by a parallel decline in emotional expressions directed towards the same (Pretty, 2007; Antal and Drews, 2015). There is an increasing global interest in anthropomorphism and its scientific study, which may remap our sociological and psychological understanding of animals and their place in society (Arluke and Sanders, 2009). Linked to this discourse is a dispute about creationism and intelligent design contra evolution, a theme which could be visited through investigating Hare Krishna conceptions of nature.

More empirical research is needed to evaluate the nature of spirituality prevailing in various eco-spiritual communities and movements. Despite the reported failure of some intentional eco-communities (Christian, 2003: 2-13), Hare Krishna farms provide room to investigate details of forces which hold communities together. A significant range of studies and empirical research cases (Shove, 2004; Ropke, 1999; Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2008; Jackson, 2009) show that involvement-based options offering both psychological solutions (e.g. belonging, self-acceptance and recognition) and immediate benefits (e.g. savings, community, pleasure) work far more effectively toward change than linear cognitive models. Spiritual communities may prompt the query if belonging is an easier option in their realms. Also, spiritual communities could be compared to each other (e.g. religious or non-religious, homogeneous or heterogeneous) and to their non-spiritual counterparts. It would be interesting to inquire what kind of spiritual communities are more prone to succeed: those which are formed as part of an existing religious organisation (e.g. Catholic Church), or those without formal organisational background? And if there is a difference, why? The specificity

of cases provides foundation for interfaith dialogues, and opens new channels of communication before the interested learner.

In closing, the Hare Krishna case has served as an illustration of the importance of worldview-related questions and (eco)spiritual agency in Sustainability Transitions queries as well as studies of social practice. Emergent research has identified a correlation between specific worldviews (spiritual, materialistic, etc.) and pro-environmental behaviours (Witt, Boer and Boersema, 2014). If worldview is indeed a key determinant of sustainability, pro or contra, it will be useful and necessary to bring it under scrutiny in research focusing on Sustainability Transitions and social practices.

Finally, apart from theorists and policy-makers, practitioners themselves could become beneficiary readers of this work. Borrowing the words of Davide Nicolini (2017: 113),

the type of representations produced by practice-based approaches are what practitioners often ask for. While practitioners at times make use of abstract concepts in making sense of problematic situations and charting new and unknown territories, they are always thirsty for descriptions of their daily practical concerns. This is because practitioners learn from others through hints, tips and examples; practitioners are always on the lookout for ideas and nuggets of wisdom that they can steal. Practice theory thus allows us to produce representations that practitioners can then use to talk about their own practice – and thereby to do something about it.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interviews

The following list refers to digitally recorded interviews, carried out following prior appointment and consent. The average length of interview was about 50 minutes.

1. 13/04/15 Moises. Volunteer from the United States. Karuna Bhavan.
2. 13/04/15 Ragunath. Manager from Latvia. Karuna Bhavan.
3. 16/04/15: Colin McDonald. Member living away from farm. Karuna Bhavan.
4. 16/04/15: Thomas Moens. Moises. Volunteer from Belgium. Karuna Bhavan.
5. 17/04/15: Gardener. Karuna Bhavan.
6. 19/04/15: Arun. University graduate. Volunteer from India, Karuna Bhavan.
7. 19/04/15: Selina. Volunteer from Scotland. Karuna Bhavan.
8. 22/04/15: Brian. Member living in village next to farm. Karuna Bhavan.
9. 22/04/15: Michael. Karuna Bhavan.
10. 23/04/15: Chef. Karuna Bhavan.
11. 23/04/15: Saranga. Philosophy graduate. Karuna Bhavan.
12. 23/04/15: Mike. Member living away from farm. Karuna Bhavan.
13. 23/04/15: Pierre. Volunteer from France. Karuna Bhavan.
14. 24/04/15: Temple President. Karuna Bhavan.
15. 08/05/15: Parasuram. Director: Food For All. Bhaktivedanta Manor.
16. 23/04/16: Volunteer devotee from Mauritius. Bhaktivedanta Manor
17. 24/04/17: Primary School Head-mistress. Bhaktivedanta Manor.
18. 24/04/17: Radha Mahan. Secretary. Bhaktivedanta Manor.
19. 27/04/17: Alison. Eco-Tour guide. Bhaktivedanta Manor.
20. 27/04/17: George. Monk. Bhaktivedanta Manor.
21. 27/04/17: Director, Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies. Oxford
22. 01/05/17: Radha Krishna. Composter innovator. Bhaktivedanta Manor.
23. 17/05/17: Education Manager. Hungarian Krishna Valley.
24. 17/05/17: Partha prabhu. Hungarian Krishna Valley.
25. 17/05/17: Ex-Finance Manager. Hungarian Krishna Valley.
26. 19/05/17: Finance Manager. Hungarian Krishna Valley.
27. 19/05/17: Business officer. Fruit preservation. Hungarian Krishna Valley.
28. 22/05/17: Leader, Oxen Department. Hungarian Krishna Valley.
29. 24/05/17: Chef. Hungarian Krishna Valley.
30. 25/05/17: Manager, Eco-Valley Foundation. (Unrecorded Skype Interview). Hungarian Krishna Valley.
31. 17/08/11: Secondary data. Interview with Professor Pekka Puska, leader of the North Karelia Project. Shared via email by interviewer Tamas Csabai.

E-mail interviews:

32. 05/06/17: Szilvia, Rev. Hungarian Krishna Valley.
33. 07/10/2017: Radha Mohan das. Bhaktivedanta Manor.
34. 29/06/2017: Radha Mohan das. Bhaktivedanta Manor.

Appendix 2. Ethical Approval and Interview Consent Form

The following application was officially approved by the University Essex in an email confirmation sent on 26th March 2015.

Application for Ethical Approval of Research Involving Human Participants

This application form should be completed for any research involving human participants conducted in or by the University. 'Human participants' are defined as including living human beings, human beings who have recently died (cadavers, human remains and body parts), embryos and fetuses, human tissue and bodily fluids, and human data and records (such as, but not restricted to medical, genetic, financial, personnel, criminal or administrative records and test results including scholastic achievements). Research should not commence until written approval has been received (from Departmental Research Director, Faculty Ethics Committee (FEC) or the University's Ethics Committee). This should be borne in mind when setting a start date for the project.

Applications should be made on this form, and submitted electronically, to your Departmental Research Director. A signed copy of the form should also be submitted. Applications will be assessed by the Research Director in the first instance, and may then passed to the FEC, and then to the University's Ethics Committee. A copy of your research proposal and any necessary supporting documentation (e.g. consent form, recruiting materials, etc) should also be attached to this form.

A full copy of the signed application will be retained by the department/school for 6 years following completion of the project. The signed application form cover sheet (two pages) will be sent to the Research Governance and Planning Manager in the REO as Secretary of the University's Ethics Committee.

1.

Title of project: CO2 transition through dietary change. The spiritual aspects of the less-meat movement.
--

2. The title of your project will be published in the minutes of the University Ethics Committee. If you object, then a reference number will be used in place of the title.

Do you object to the title of your project being published? Yes ☐ / No ☒

3. This Project is: ☐ Staff Research Project ☒ Student Project

4. Principal Investigator(s) (students should also include the name of their supervisor):

Name:	Department:
Tamas Lestar	Essex Business School

Prof. Steffen Boehm	Essex Business School
Dr. Jane Hindley	Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities

5. **Proposed start date:** April 2015
6. **Probable duration:** 6 months

7. Will this project be externally funded? Yes ☐ / No ☒

8. What is the source of the funding?
- self-funded

9. If external approval for this research has been given, then only this cover sheet needs to be submitted

External ethics approval obtained (attach evidence of approval) Yes ☐ / No ☒

Declaration of Principal Investigator:

The information contained in this application, including any accompanying information, is, to the best of my knowledge, complete and correct. I/we have read the University's *Guidelines for Ethical Approval of Research Involving Human Participants* and accept responsibility for the conduct of the procedures set out in this application in accordance with the guidelines, the University's *Statement on Safeguarding Good Scientific Practice* and any other conditions laid down by the University's Ethics Committee. I/we have attempted to identify all risks related to the research that may arise in conducting this research and acknowledge my/our obligations and the rights of the participants.

Signature(s): Tamas Lestar.....

Name(s) in block capitals:TAMAS LESustainability
TransitionsAR.....

Date: ...23 February 2015.....

Supervisor's recommendation (Student Projects only):

I have read and approved both the research proposal and this application.

Supervisor's signature:Steffen Boehm

.....

Outcome:

The Departmental Director of Research (DoR) has reviewed this project and considers the methodological/technical aspects of the proposal to be appropriate to the tasks

proposed. The DoR considers that the investigator(s) has/have the necessary qualifications, experience and facilities to conduct the research set out in this application, and to deal with any emergencies and contingencies that may arise.

This application falls under Annex B and is approved on behalf of the FEC ☐

This application is referred to the FEC because it does not fall under Annex B ☐

This application is referred to the FEC because it requires independent scrutiny ☐

Signature(s):

.....
.....

Name(s) in block capitals:

.....

Department:

.....
.....

Date:

.....
.....

The application has been approved by the FEC ☐

The application has not been approved by the FEC ☐

The application is referred to the University Ethics Committee ☐

Signature(s):

.....
.....

Name(s) in block capitals:

.....

Faculty:

.....

Date:

.....
.....

Details of the Project

1. **Brief outline of project** (This should include the purpose or objectives of the research, brief justification, and a summary of methods. It should be approx. 150 words in everyday language that is free from jargon).

I aim to investigate the spiritual dimensions and impacts of dietary transition towards a more sustainable life-style. Science argues for an urgency to reduce meat consumption, yet it is continuously growing. To address this phenomenon sustainability transition management endeavours to test and trigger changes as they occur in relevant communities. However, transition research tends to stress the technological or business innovation potentials of the projects, largely neglecting the lived experiences of the community members. A study to look into the spiritual aspects of less-meat communities will contribute to this body of literature as well as inform community management and policy making. The main questions are:

1. how personal change takes place and maintained in spiritual communities
2. how both members and outsiders are influenced
3. how do the above relate to a potential systemic change

Empirically I will conduct ethnographic research as a participant observer and interviewer in two eco-farms run by Hare Krishna (Scotland) and Seventh-day Adventist believers.

Participant Details

2. Will the research involve human participants? (indicate as appropriate)

Yes



No



3. Who are they and how will they be recruited? (If any recruiting materials are to be used, e.g. advertisement or letter of invitation, please provide copies).

The Hare Krishna Eco-Farm in Scotland is run by monks who also reside on the farm. They will be the primary target for research observation and interviews, but other members and outsiders will also be interviewed either within the farm or at outreach events. On such occasions the mediation of community managers or members will be used to recruit participants. I will stay together with the monks on a volunteer observer basis. I have made official contact with them electronically and they are ready to receive me anytime as I was sent a form of availability to be filled prior to the visit.

The Adventist Eco-Farm in Scotland is run by church members who also reside on the farm. They will be the primary target for research observation and interviews, but other members and outsiders (e.g. farming students) will also be interviewed either within the farm or at outreach events. On such occasions, the mediation of community managers or members will be used to recruit participants. I have the email address to the management and as I know them through e-mail

communication (I supported students financially there) it is very likely that they will accept my proposal for the research.

Will participants be paid or reimbursed?

There will be no payment or reimbursement for participation

4. Could participants be considered:

(a) to be vulnerable (e.g. children, mentally-ill)? Yes ☐/ No ☒

(b) to feel obliged to take part in the research? Yes ☐/ No ☒

If the answer to either of these is yes, please explain how the participants could be considered vulnerable and why vulnerable participants are necessary for the research.

N/a

Informed Consent

5. Will the participant's consent be obtained for involvement in the research orally or in writing? (If in writing, please attach an example of written consent for approval):

Yes ☒

No ☐

How will consent be obtained and recorded? If consent is not possible, explain why.

Informed consent will be obtained on first contact with all participants prior to their engagement with my fieldwork. Contact with each participant will be achieved on an individual basis, it will be necessary to therefore gain individual informed consent. As the project develops, demands on participants may change, for this reason, consent will be gained before every interview or observation and participants will be reminded they can withdraw at any time without ramifications.

Informed consent will be obtained in written form.

Please attach a participant information sheet where appropriate.

Confidentiality / Anonymity

6. If the research generates personal data, describe the arrangements for maintaining anonymity and confidentiality or the reasons for not doing so.

Confidentiality of research participants is essential not only to meet the requirements of my project but also to comply with international research norms. The BSA acknowledge that 'the anonymity and privacy of those who participate in the research process should be respected'. In the context of my study this includes 'not discussing information provided by an individual with others'. Data analysis will occur in different phases of my research which will drive the following phases. The analysis will leave the data anonymous, so confidentiality and anonymity are upheld throughout the research process. I will also use pseudonyms for every participant. This notion is supported by the BSA who state that 'identities and research records of those participating in research should be kept confidential whether or not an explicit pledge of confidentiality has been given' (BSA, 2002: 5). In field notes and interview transcripts, key identifiable features will be changed to ensure anonymity for every participant. This will prevent the identification of participants from raw data.

However, the identities of the farms themselves will be revealed as both communities regard this research as a potential for networking.

Data Access, Storage and Security

7. Describe the arrangements for storing and maintaining the security of any personal data collected as part of the project. Please provide details of those who will have access to the data.

Before data is collected participants will be made aware of the storage of data, they will also be made aware of how data is obtained and can change the method if they want. This falls in line with the BSA advice who state that participants 'should be able to reject the use of data gathering devices such as tape-recorders and video cameras' (BSA, 2002: 704).

Data will be collected and stored securely to prevent others gaining access to it. Observations and field notes will be recorded on paper, and stored in a padlocked storage unit in the location I am staying, which only I will have access to. They will be transcribed onto computer and then the hard copy will be destroyed. Interviews will be recorded using a Dictaphone, which may also be useful for observations. The data will be downloaded and stored on two password protected private email accounts. Only I will have access to the hard copy, and only myself and my supervisors will have access to the soft copy of the raw data. They will continue to be stored in the same fashion until the submission of my project.

It is a requirement of the Data Protection Act 1998 to ensure individuals are aware of how information about them will be managed. Please tick the box to confirm that participants will be informed of the data access, storage and security arrangements described above. If relevant, it is appropriate for this to be done via the participant information sheet ☒

Further guidance about the collection of personal data for research purposes and compliance with the Data Protection Act can be accessed at the following weblink. Please tick the box to confirm that you have read this guidance (http://www.essex.ac.uk/records_management/policies/data_protection_and_research.aspx) ☒

Risk and Risk Management

8. Are there any potential risks (e.g. physical, psychological, social, legal or economic) to participants or subjects associated with the proposed research?

Yes ☐

No ☒

If Yes,

Please provide full details and explain what risk management procedures will be put in place to minimise the risks:

--

9. Are there any potential risks to researchers as a consequence of undertaking this proposal that are greater than those encountered in normal day-to-day life?

Yes ☐

No ☒

If Yes,

Please provide full details and explain what risk management procedures will be put in place to minimise the risks:

--

10. Will the research involve individuals below the age of 18 or individuals of 18 years and over with a limited capacity to give informed consent?

Yes ☐


No ☒

If Yes, a criminal records disclosure (CRB check) within the last three years is required.

Please provide details of the “clear disclosure”:

Date of disclosure:
Type of disclosure:
Organisation that requested disclosure:

11. Are there any other ethical issues that have not been addressed which you would wish to bring to the attention of the Faculty and/or University Ethics Committees



BSA 2002. Statement of ethical practice for the British Sociological Association.

<http://www.britisoc.co.uk/media/27107/StatementofEthicalPractice.pdf>: British Sociological Association.

GRINYER, A. 2009. The Anonymity of Research Participants: Assumptions, Ethics, and Practicalities. *Pan*, 12, 49-58.

GUARIM, V. L. 2000. Sustentabilidade ambiental em comunidades ribeirinhas tradicionais. *III Simpósio sobre Recursos Naturais e Socioeconômicos do Pantanal: Os Desafios do Novo Milênio. Corumbá-MS*, 27-30.

GUARIM, V. L. 2002. *Barranco Alto: uma experie`ncia em educacacã ambiental*, Cuiaba, Duke University Press.

SIN, C. H. 2005. Seeking informed consent: Reflections on research practice. *Sociology*, 39, 277-294.

WALFORD, G. 2005. Research ethical guidelines and anonymity 1. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 28, 83-93.

WILES, R., CROW, G., HEATH, S. & CHARLES, V. 2008. The management of confidentiality and anonymity in social research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 11, 417-428.

Consent Form (to be signed by respondents)



University of Essex

ESSEX
BUSINESS
SCHOOL

Student: Tamas Lestar
tlest@essex.ac.uk

1st Supervisor: Professor Steffen Boehm
067159

+447457

2nd supervisor: Dr Jane Hindley

LOW CARBON TRANSITION THROUGH DIATERY CHANGE THE SPIRITUAL ASPECTS OF THE LESS-MEAT MOVEMENT

I am a PhD candidate in Business Management in the Essex Business School at the University of Essex. I am studying the spiritual impacts of dietary change in and through spiritual communities.

You have been asked to participate in this research due to your experience and knowledge in this subject. This interview has been designed to be approximately 40 minutes in length, however please feel free to expand on any topic or discuss related ideas. If there are questions you do not feel confident or comfortable answering, please feel free to indicate this and I will move on to the next question.

All the information you provide will be confidential and will be used for the sole purpose of research for my PhD project. The interview will be recorded using a Dictaphone which will be stored in a locked cabinet until transcribed. All transcribed data will be stored in a password protected private email account, after the transcription has been completed the Dictaphone data will be destroyed. Availability of the transcripts will be limited to myself and my supervisors and upon completion of my project all data will be destroyed.

Participant's agreement:

I am aware that my participation in this interview is voluntary, if for any reason, at any time, I wish to stop the interview, I may do so without need for an explanation. I understand the intent and purpose of this research.

I am aware the data will be used for a PhD project, I have the right to review, comment on, add/withdraw information prior to the project's submission.

Participant Name:

Participant Signature:

Date:

Appendix 3. Sample of the Coding Process

(Sample taken from Appendix 1, Interview 12)

<p>Q: I understand also that there was a match with the way you ate, the kind of diet you followed.</p> <p>A: Well, almost a match. But a mismatch at the same time. I was surprised that the Hare Krishnas were not vegans. But then I learnt how important cows were to the Hindu philosophy which made me even more surprised that they were continuing to buy supermarket milk. I found it a strange contradiction that the cow is held in such high esteem but at the same time people who buy milk regardless of their faith, anyone who buys supermarket milk, is directly contributing to the slaughter of the cow, the bull and the calves. All of them go to slaughter eventually. Therefore in my opinion the best thing you can do to try to help the cows is to not give your money to an organization that is eventually going to slaughter them. And that is before you even consider the life of the cow when they ARE delivering milk, which as you probably know in industrialized farming is a very very poor existence for them and something I feel very very strongly about and therefore I find myself as part of small minority of Krishna Conscious Devotees. But although we are a small minority we are growing and I hope that one day the Krishna Conscious Society or Communities can ... can develop a better system for</p>	<p>Veganism</p> <p>Cow protection</p> <p>Dairy (supermarket)</p> <p>Compromise</p> <p>Violence</p> <p>Mainstream (meat industry)</p>
---	--

<p>both protecting the cows and for using milk which may sound strange coming from a vegan ... but if the philosophy is the consumption of milk, then the milk that you are consuming should be the highest quality of milk and it should only come from ahimsa breed and ahimsa cows (4: 30). Himsa meaning violence, ahimsa meaning non-violence. But you can then enter the debate of what ahimsa means. There is all sorts of interpretations but that's another matter.</p>	<p>Cow protection</p> <p>Dairy (quality of)</p> <p>Compassion (non-violence)</p>
<p>Q: So how did you become a vegan?</p> <p>A: I had been a vegetarian 10 years ago but then I stopped being a vegetarian. But when I became a vegan almost 2 years ago it was because I the United Kingdom we had the horse meet scandal. At that time, and I hate to say this, I was buying a lot of the very same specific products that were in the news saying that they were full of horse meat. So I researched for that and I discovered that not only was it horse meat but any meat that was finding its way into your meal they were unable to trace it, they didn't know the history of the meat. They could barely tell you which country it came from. And ultimately in one meal from the supermarket there can be dozens of different animals from all over the world and you don't know where that's come from. So that moment I decided to stop eating meat. Just like that. I decided I never again eating meat.</p>	<p>Vegetarianism;</p> <p>Durability</p> <p>Veganism</p> <p>Mainstream (scandal)</p> <p>Meat (horse)</p> <p>Mainstream (supermarket)</p> <p>Competence;</p> <p>Change (point of turn)</p>

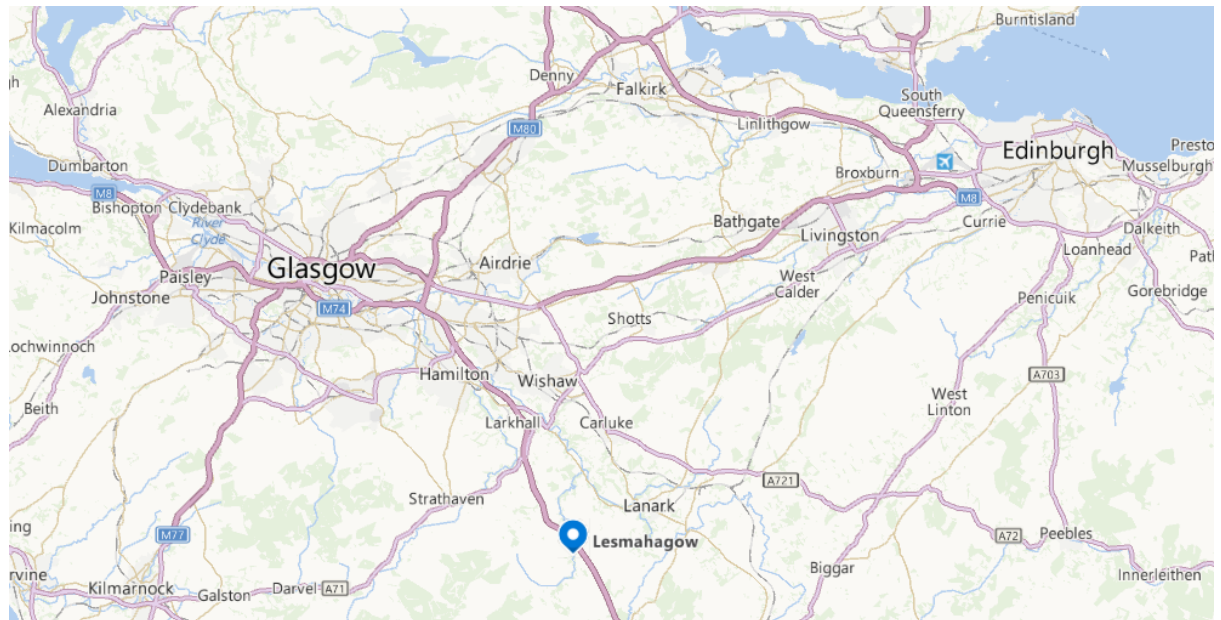
<p>Q: It was before you Googled Krishna.</p> <p>A: Yes, it was before. It was probably 10 months before. So I decided I was going to be vegetarian and continue to eat dairy. I didn't know I had no idea how bad the dairy industry was for animals ... I didn't know. I thought it was fine. But then I continued to eat butter, so instead of taking processed margarine I had really good pure butter. And the first time I bought butter I put some butter on toast and I bit into it and it was like oh wow it was just pure animal fat - and I immediately felt disgusted by it. I thought OK I cannot do this anymore either. So that moment I became a vegan. It was the thought of the animal fat, because although we're not tearing the flesh from the animal and eating the flesh, the milk to me is still liquid meat. You know it is like liquid meat and I thought it is animal fat probably not good for my body probably not supposed to be in my body. So that point I said OK nothing from animals any more. Nothing from animals.</p>	<p>Vegetarianism</p> <p>Mainstream (dairy industry)</p> <p>Change (shift to veganism)</p> <p>Meat</p> <p>Change (point of turn)</p>
<p>Q: What about other aspects of Krishna beliefs? Do you think there is an openness to change?</p> <p>A: I think if you believe in the Bhavagad Gíta and the Srimad Bhagavatam and Prabhupada, if you believe in the Vedic</p>	

<p>teachings, then there is no room for maneuver. Because these teachings are so old, and you have the faith, because it is a question of FAITH, not a question of science, a question of faith. If you have the faith that these teachings are correct then why would you want to deviate from them and why would you want to alter or adjust them? So I think the movement is not open to changing the teachings because of Prabhupada said "it is the Western propensity to change things" - and not necessarily in a good way.</p>	<p>Spirituality (Vedic, Meaning)</p> <p>Spirituality (Faith, Beliefs, Meaning))</p> <p>ISKCON (change management)</p>
<p>Q: Are they good for the health?</p> <p>A: Very good for the health. I think meat production is unsustainable. We have a crazy situation in this world where we grow grains to feed an animal to slaughter the animal to feed us. Why don't we just take the grains and feed them directly to ourselves. And feed far more people. There is no way the world should be starving.</p>	<p>Health; Meat</p> <p>Sustainability (un-, of production);</p> <p>Mainstream</p> <p>Sustainability</p>
<p>Q: Do you know much about the organizational structure of the ISCKON? Is it a top down or bottom up organization?</p> <p>A: Top Down, for sure. It is a very strange model, because they are all ISCKON, but they are all independent. Every</p>	<p>ISKCON (top down management)</p>

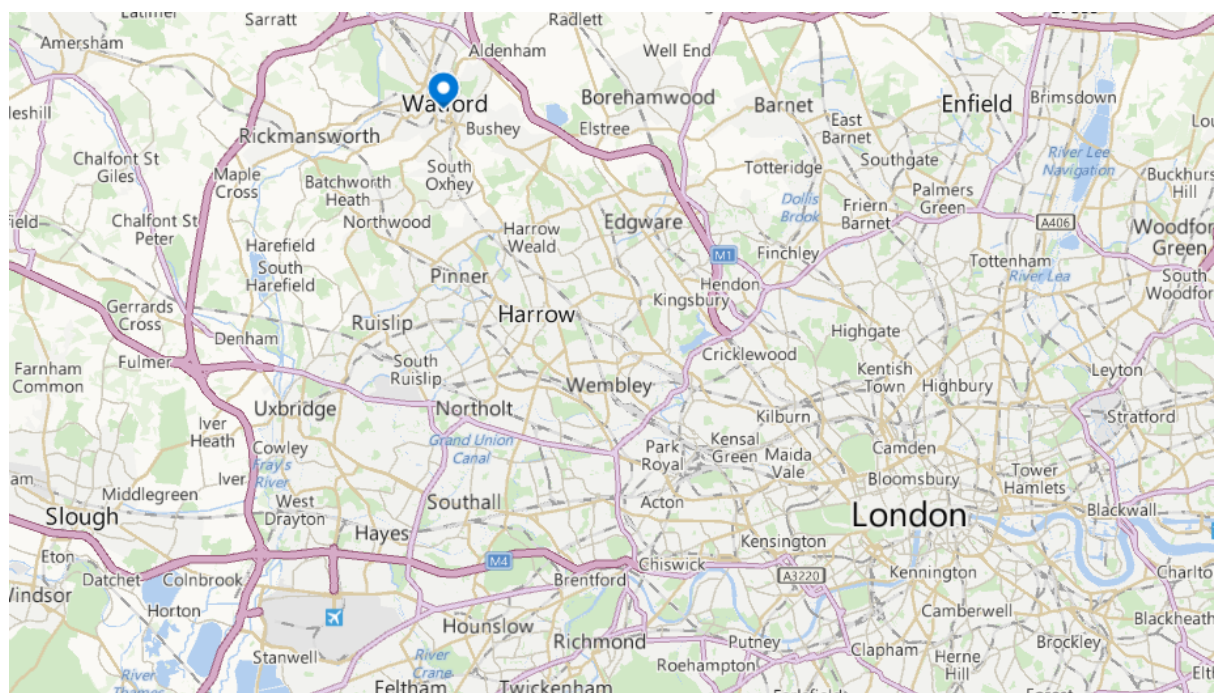
<p>A: Yes. That's what you mean by a gender imbalance, well the answer to your question is: yes, there is a gender imbalance. You only have to look and see that there are no female wwoofers here. There is a story behind that but it's not particularly relevant. But, again, in Krishna Consciousness in the Vedic.. you see here people are trying to pursue the Vedic way of life. And back in Vedic times men and women had clearly delineated roles that to ourselves in modern times we maybe find a little offensive or not progressive or backward or sexist. You know in Vedic times you would have women having household duties, making flours for the deities, and the men would be working the land creating the circumstances to feed the household, this kind of thing. But that's in Vedic times. We are not in Vedic times, we are here and I think it is to the society's detriment that we don't have an equal balance of men and women. Because your gender doesn't mean any difference to your intellect, your commitment, your knowledge, you know. So yes I think there is a gender imbalance and I don't like it.</p>	<p>Gender (roles)</p> <p>Spirituality (Vedic times)</p> <p>Spirituality (Vedic times)</p> <p>Gender (equality; imbalance)</p>
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Appendix 4. Photographs

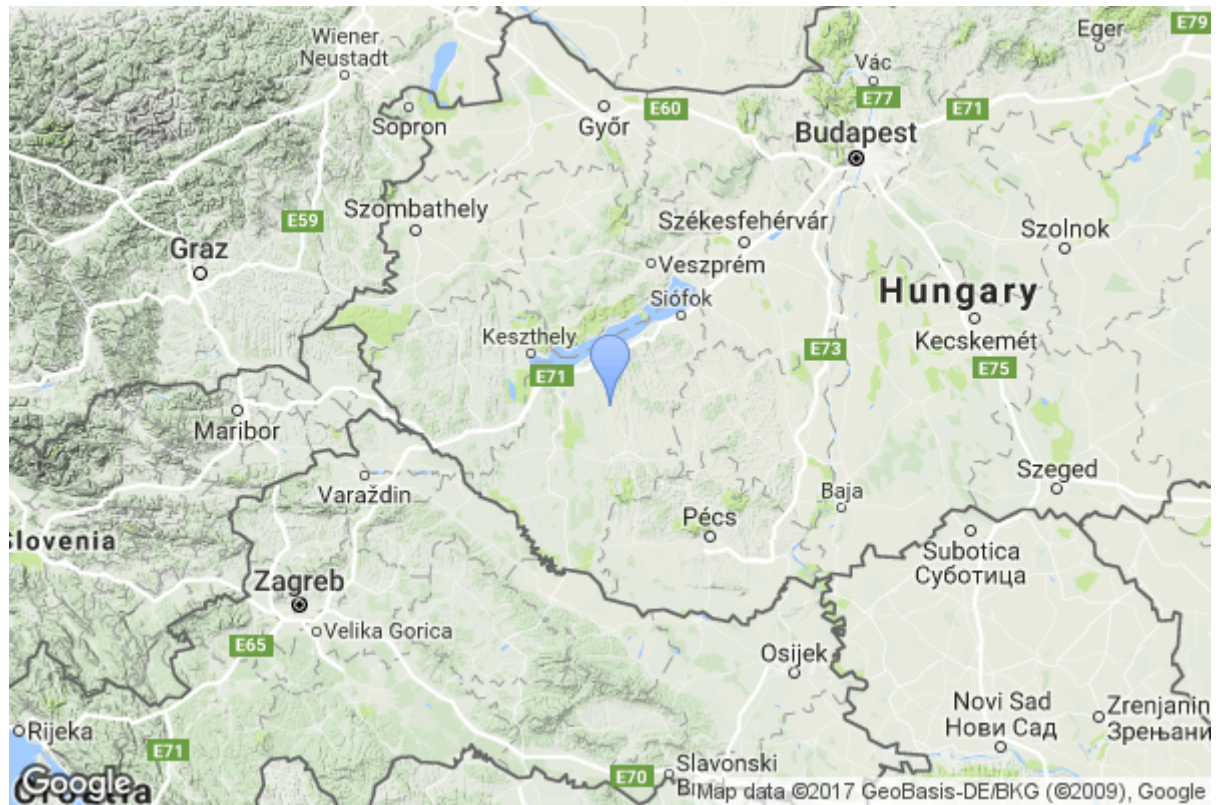
Karuna Bhavan, Lesmahagow (Pictures 4-19); Bhaktivedanta Manor, Watford (Pictures 20-41); Krishna Valley, Hungary (Pictures 42-54)



Picture 1. Karuna Bhavan (Lesmahagow) on map



Picture 2. Bhaktivedanta Manor (Watford) on map



Picture 3. Krishna Valley on map (Hungary). Lake Balaton to the North of the farm attracts many visitors from across Europe, especially Germany



Picture 4. Breakfast. Porridge and Krishna sweet made from dairy. These sweets are very important as they are special offering items



Picture 5. Using leftover lunch to supplement breakfast is a norm in Scotland, though not recommended by Vedic scripts



Picture 6. Media output about the chief gardener in Karuna Bhavan (magazines, The Guardian, BBC, etc.)



Picture 7. Bhakti and his glasshouse in Karuna Bhavan



Picture 8: One of the glasshouses



Picture 9: The view on Lesmahagow village from the eco-farm (Karuna Bhavan)



Picture 10: Volunteers and devotees eating together



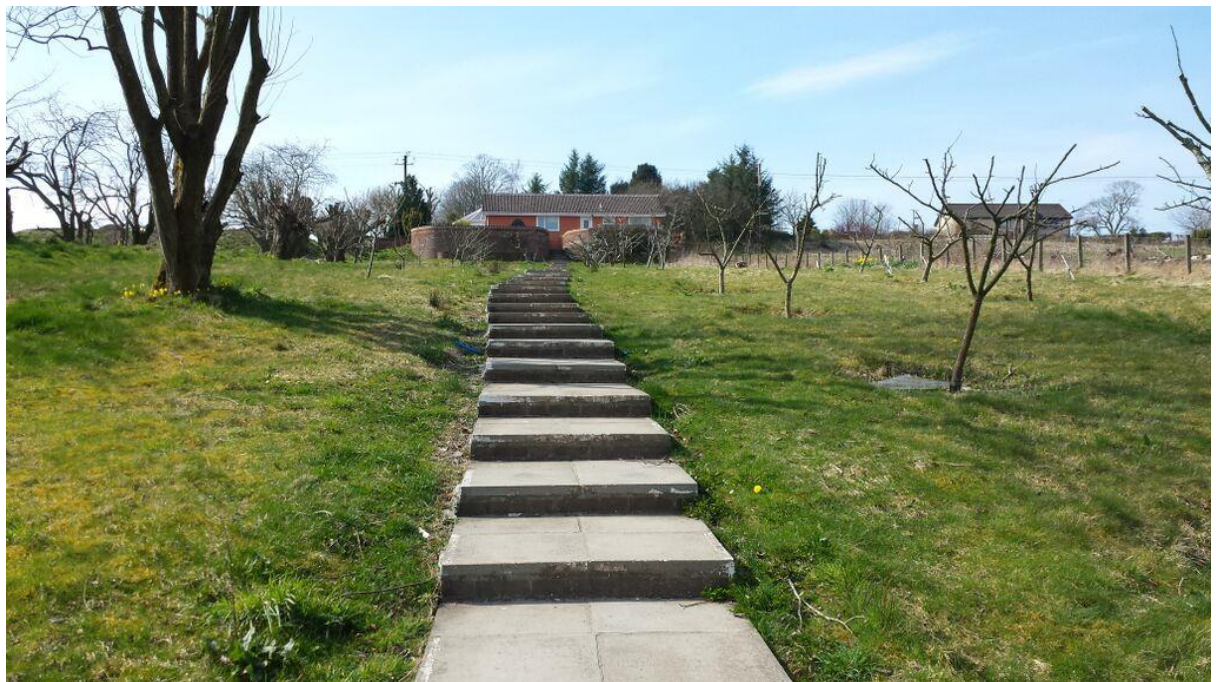
Picture 11: Early hyacinths for deities



Picture 12: Typical Hare Krishna lunch, Indian style



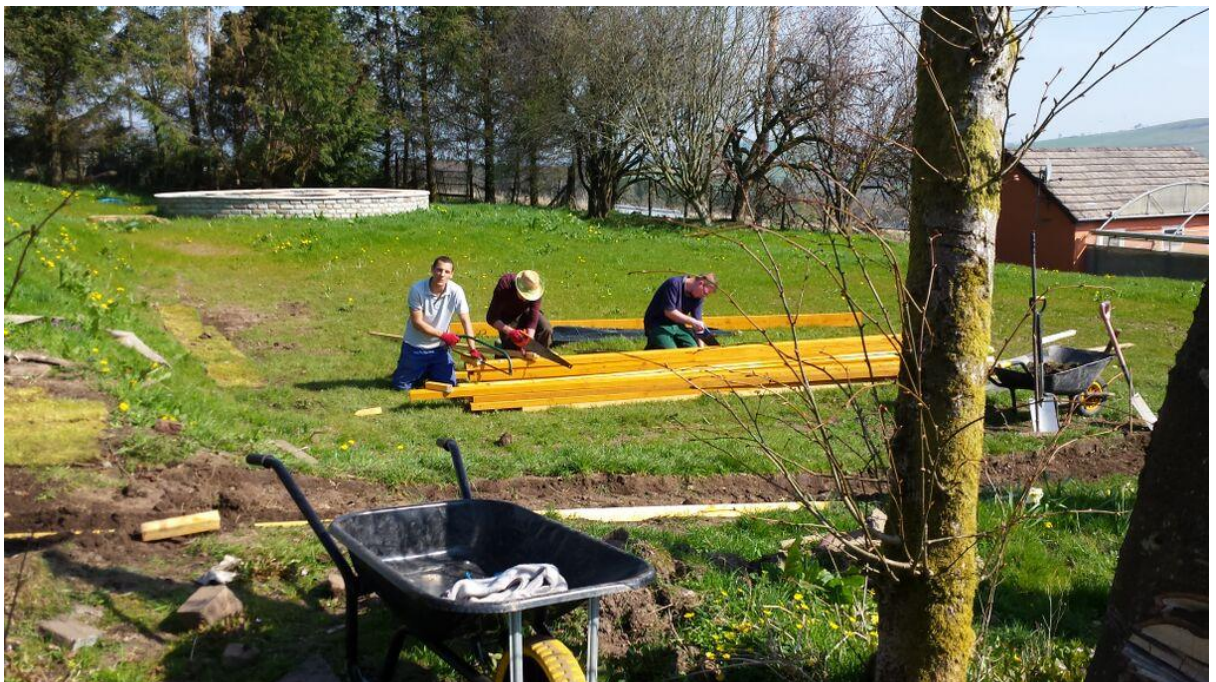
Picture 13: Lentils (dahl) to go with the lunch



Picture 14: A steep climb leading up the communal buildings



Picture 15: The wind turbines



Picture 16: Volunteers on duty



Picture 17: Volunteers



Picture 18: Outreach in Glasgow. I did not mean to join but was 'forced' to wear the orange scarf



Picture 19: Music outreach programme in Edinburgh



Picture 20: The Manor donated to the movement by George Harrison (Watford)



Picture 21: Cows are called by their names



Picture 22: Food foe All service van



Picture 23: Eating on the floor (a frequent custom)



Picture 24: Contemplative garden (famous vegetarians)

Why Vegetarianism?

According to the laws of God, killing an animal is as punishable as killing a man. God is the supreme father, why should He sanction the killing of animals who are also His sons?
— A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

Don't Eat My Friend

Go Veggie

I have no doubt that it is a part of the destiny of the human race, in its gradual improvement, to leave off eating animals.
— Thoreau

Karma

For every action there is a reaction.

Is there a connection between the violence human beings inflict upon each other in war and the violence humans inflict upon the animals they slaughter for meat? According to the law of karma, the answer is yes.

An acre of grains produces five times more protein than an acre of pasture set aside for meat production. An acre of beans or peas produces ten times more, and an acre of spinach twenty-eight times more protein.

Food Source	Relative Yield
Grains	356
Beans/Peas	260
Spinach	211
Meat (poultry)	138
Meat (cattle)	45
Meat (pork)	20

Food For All Kings Cross Resource Centre

Food For All (FFA) is a charitable organization run entirely by dedicated volunteers, which distributes free hot meals in London on a daily basis. Food For All targets the homeless, people with mental health problems, pensioners and single parents amongst others, feeding an average of 1000 people daily.

Come and visit us at
102 Caledonian Rd, Kings Cross,
London

As long as there are laughlines there will always be war.
(J. Tolson)

Four famous vegetarians

Picture 25: Explaining vegetarianism in the contemplative garden (Tha Manor)



Picture 26: Explaining vegetarianism in the contemplative garden (The Manor)



Picture 27: Code of conduct and direction signs



Picture 28: Bullock-cart



Picture 29: Ploughing by oxen only (no tractors in the Manor)



Picture 30: Getting ready for the feeding programme in London (1000 people daily)



Picture 31: One tricycle is now loaded



Picture 32: Delivering the food into a no-car zone is hard work



Picture 33: The second tricycle



Picture 34: I am doing my best to help



Picture 35: I am cooking for the Feeding 1000 programme



Picture 36: Expired or nearly expired food items



Picture 37: Queuing up for free food



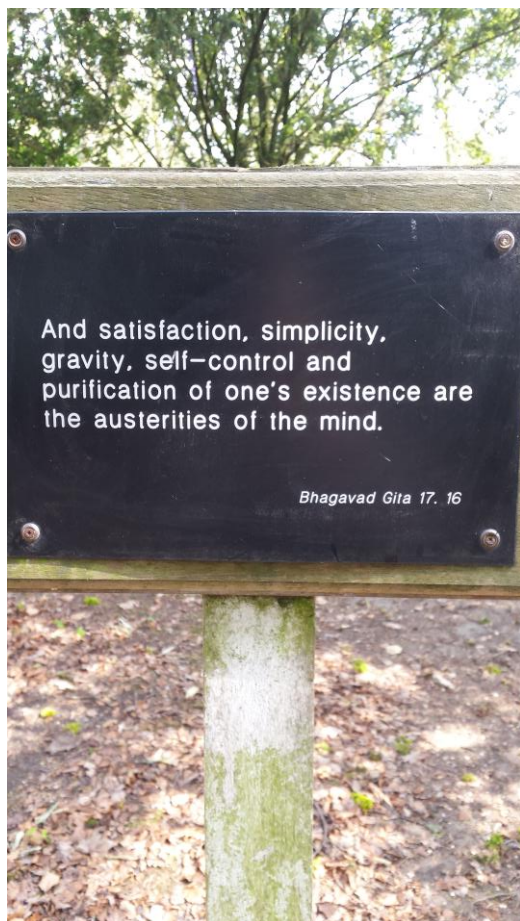
Picture 38: Compassion is highly esteemed in the community



Picture 39: One of the gardens at Bhaktivedanta Manor



Picture 40: Secondary school class visiting the eco- farm in the Manor



Picture 41: Walking path display



Picture 42: Kneading dough for a large event in the Krishna Valley



Picture 43: Preparing cakes



Picture 44: Rolls made by wholemeal flour (spelt harvested on-site in the Krishna Valley)



Picture 45: Entrance to the Hungarian Krishna Valley



Picture 46: Primary school..Students often use bike to go to school

2. Megújuló energiaforrások



Az eltűzelhető növényi anyagok (pl. fa, növényi szárazak) előállításának ideje néhány évben, évtizedben mérhető, ezért megújulónak nevezzük őket. Szintén megújulónak számít például a napsugárzás és a szél energiája. Ezzel szemben a nem megújuló fosszilis energiahordozók (kőolaj, földgáz, kőszén) több millió év alatt keletkeznek, hozzáférésük korlátozott, készleteik végesek.

A Krisna-völgyi energiagazdálkodás fő elve az önállóságra való törekvés, és ezzel szoros összefüggésben a megújuló energiaforrások használata.

Érdekesség:

A közelünkben található épület Krisna-völgy általános iskolája (védikus néven Gurukula), amelynek energia-igényét teljes mértékben megújuló forrásokból fedezzük. A fűtés és vízmelegítés fával történik. A világításhoz szükséges áramot szélkerekekkel és napelemekkel állítjuk elő.

Krisna-völgyben a fűtés és melegvíz-előállítás fával történik. Az alapítás éve, 1993 óta mintegy 300 000 fát telepítettünk, melynek legnagyobb része a tűzifa ellátást szolgálja. Jelenleg (2013-ban) 25%-ban vagyunk önállóan tüzfából.



Az önállóság közösségi összefogással valósítható meg leginkább. Fosszilis energiaforrások nélkül is meg kell tudnunk oldani például a gabonaérlést vagy a földek megművelését. Ilyen értelemben számunkra – a tűzifa mellett – a legfontosabb megújuló energiaforrás az ökördő.



A háztartások elektromos energia igényét kisméretű napelemek és szélkerekek biztosítják. Az így termelt áram csak kisebb háztartási gépek működtetéséhez elegendő, illetve egy-egy halogén izzó vagy LED-es lámpa működtetésére alkalmas, a gyertyák és olajmécsesek kiegészítéseként.



www.okovolgy.hu

Picture 47: One of the stations of the Eco-Tour



Picture 48: Statue reminding people of their Karmic fate



Picture 49: Ox cart for work and tourism alike



Picture 50: Visitors of an eco-tour in the Krishna Valley. All of them are elderly women and obese.



Picture 51: Ready for the ox-cart ride



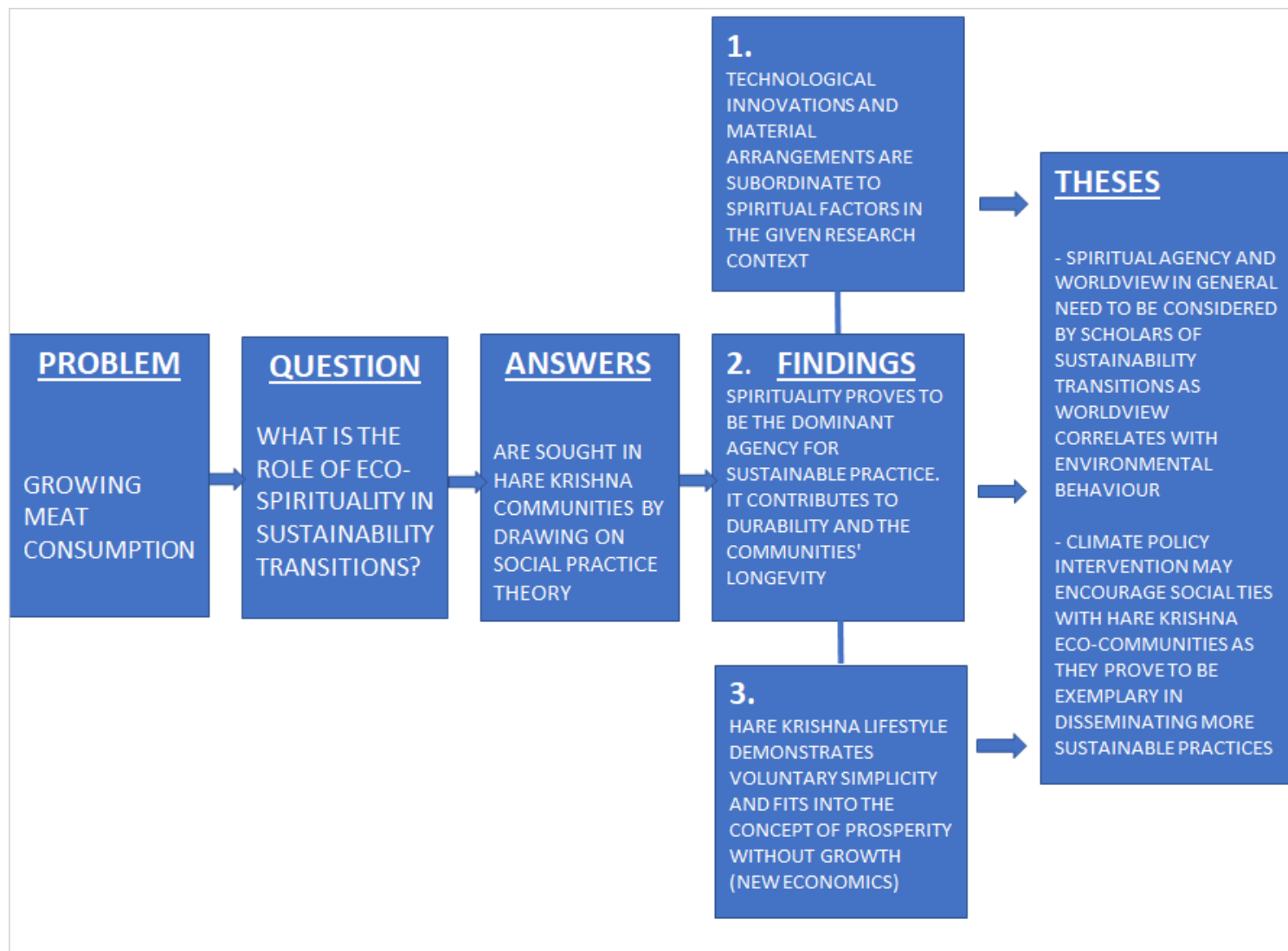
Picture 52: Cycling is an easy option on the farm in Hungary



Picture 53: Gathering for food. Women and men in separate rows.



Picture 54: Learning to milk in the goshala (cowshed)



Picture 55:
Visual representation of
thesis