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Living with Tension:  
Pursuing Ecological Practice in an  
Aotearoa/New Zealand Eco-Village

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A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts in Social Anthropology at Massey  
University, Manawatū, New Zealand.

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# Abstract

This research explores the experiences of an eco-village in Aotearoa/New Zealand, called Whakatipu, as they pursued ecologically ethical lifestyles. I stayed in Whakatipu and undertook participant observation for a month, working alongside residents, and interviewed eighteen of the thirty-eight people who live there. I use Bourdieu's theory of practice to analyse how eco-villagers pursued their ideals in practice, with the aim of ascertaining whether elements of their experience could help others, such as myself, pursue ecological living. A key concept from Bourdieu's framework is habitus, which helps to describe the naturalized, strategic way-of-being in the world that eco-villagers had developed. My findings illustrate that despite having strong motivations for ecological living, and the economic capacity to embark on this project, eco-villagers were unable to achieve many of their ideals. A common statement was 'sustainability is not possible.' All eco-villagers faced challenges to their ability to achieve an ecological lifestyle, and had to make compromises. Different people made different compromises, which contributed to conflict. Such challenges existed, in part, because the societal context that Whakatipu was embedded in was characterized by a consumer-capitalist ideology that eco-villagers simultaneously rejected, but remained reliant on. Rather than considering themselves to have failed, eco-villagers developed a habitus that enabled them to move towards their ideal ecological lifestyle, despite their inability to completely achieve this lifestyle.

These experiences demonstrate the need for context to be considered in discussing the efforts of individuals to put their values into action. Ecologically ethical living cannot simply be the result of individual action and responsibility. Furthermore, rigid conceptions of ethical 'success' or 'failure' do not account for the attempts of individuals, with diverse backgrounds and worldviews, to lead better lives in constrained circumstances. Ecologically ethical living at an individual level is not simply a matter of failure or success, but is better understood as efforts that create progress towards an ideal.

Keywords: Eco-village, intentional community, ecological ethics, Bourdieu, eco-habitus, New Zealand, ethical practice, sustainability, permaculture

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# Introduction

Our current epoch has been termed the ‘anthropocene’ to recognize humanity’s irreversible impact on earth’s ecosystems, and there is a growing understanding that we must seek more sustainable living. The threat of climate change, particularly, is causing many to acknowledge the short- and long-term consequences of excessive consumption. The discourse surrounding this situation is diverse – is individual change needed, or structural? Ethical justifications also vary; environmental philosophy has long debated whether nature should be conserved for its intrinsic value, or primarily for human sustenance. Such debates, however, are arguably becoming meaningless – ecological disintegration is so immense that it threatens all ethical priorities. As Kretz states, “those who are already multiply oppressed, and least responsible for causing environmental harms [...] suffer first and worst from the ecological crisis” (2013, p. 928). Exposure to these issues has convinced many that at some level, ecologically sound living is necessary. Governments have begun to co-operatively address society’s unsustainable direction, the Paris Agreement being an example. However, this progress can be hampered by political or economic turbulence.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, many individuals experience dissonance between their endless consumption, and the subsequent environmental and social damage they knowingly contribute to. New Zealand, as a nation, currently consumes just under twice the global average, and thus three times the global sustainable amount per capita (Global Footprint Network, 2015).<sup>2</sup>

After three years of undergraduate anthropological study that exposed me to these issues, I was aware of my lifestyle’s consequences, but unsure of how to address my unsustainable practices. I questioned whether I could actually stop driving, for instance, when my lifestyle practically demanded it. For my Master’s thesis, I wanted to explore how to pursue a sustainable existence that matched my ethical convictions. My lecturer, Dr. Carolyn Morris, suggested I look at the experience of people already

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<sup>1</sup> The Paris Agreement is a UN initiative to keep 21<sup>st</sup> century global temperature rise “below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels”; as of 5<sup>th</sup> October 2017, enough nations signed the agreement for it to come into force (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2014). However, the potential for these goals to be met was thrown into doubt as U.S. president Donald Trump withdrew from the agreement (Shear, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> This is determined by measuring earth’s total sustainable production (biocapacity) in hectares, and dividing it by the amount of humans that will be supported by this production; more specific results can then be given for individual nations (Global Footprint Network, 2017).

engaged in such practice. To this end, I sought to find an eco-village – something I had no experience with – to see what I could learn from people who had constructed their lives around pursuing a more ecologically ethical existence. To this end, I found Whakatipu,<sup>3</sup> a New Zealand eco-village, and stayed there for a month, conducting participant observation and interview fieldwork – combining traditional village-based ethnography with the more recently pioneered ‘anthropology at home.’ There, I encountered new practices, had inspiring conversations, and made new friends.

However, research in Whakatipu did not provide quite what I expected. While I encountered numerous practices that could replace some of my unsustainable actions, more pertinent conclusions came as I reconsidered what it meant to develop an ethical lifestyle while under constant pressure to conform to mainstream practice. Whakatipu’s experiences illustrate that if there is to be a societal shift toward more ecological living, there will be multiple expressions of ethical prioritization, and we need to recognize that life is too complex for fixed rules for correct practice. Individuals need to develop context-specific strategies that will help them navigate day-to-day challenges, some of which will inevitably involve compromise, while maintaining an overall ethical *direction*.

Before I outline the aims of this thesis, I will introduce the community with whom I conducted research.

## **About Whakatipu**

Whakatipu sits on a peninsula in Aotearoa/New Zealand’s North Island, an hour away from the closest city. Founded in 1997 by a dozen families, this community developed a neglected dairy runoff block into their environmentalist enclave home, teeming with gardens and replanted forest. I describe my process of selecting this location in Chapter Two.

My introduction to Whakatipu occurred at night. After my bus pulled into the nearby town, I met one of my hosts, Katherine,<sup>4</sup> for the first time. As we drove into the community, an indiscernible landscape illuminated only by headlights, I explained my research’s aims. She interjected that this might not be the kind of community I was looking for, as there were social rifts between many residents. This was an abrupt introduction to Whakatipu’s lived reality, something that I hadn’t expected within

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<sup>3</sup> Whakatipu is a pseudonym for the community.

<sup>4</sup> All names are pseudonyms.



what I had imagined to be a tranquil, cooperative community. The following morning, I woke up and walked from my hosts' sleep-out to their main residence, which resembled an eco-castle. A thick mist rendered the sun a hazy glow over a Tolkien-esque earthen-brick turret. These factors quickly created the feeling that I had unexpectedly arrived in a completely different world. Within a few days, however, a sense of normality returned, and Whakatipu began to feel familiar.

As I walked between houses, I felt a nostalgia stemming from my childhood experiences in other parts of rural New Zealand. Whakatipu lay on a rural stretch leading out of the nearest 'blink-and-you'll-miss-it' town, about ten minutes away. A gravel access road followed the peninsula's central ridge, with driveways to individual residences falling away on either side. Many unconventional houses were



*Figure 1.* The scene of my first morning of fieldwork.

visible from this road, incorporating various eco-building principles – tiny houses, earth-roof, and earthen-brick were all present. The community was surrounded by rolling fields, home to a cattle herd, and punctuated by many groves of trees and bush. Beyond this was a tidal inlet, rich in fish. At points throughout my stay, thunderstorms drove across the sky and created torrents in the rugged, constantly on-the-mend road. When spring arrived, so did the sun, and skinks would scurry away in the long grass as I approached. The growing heat then made work more tiring, but the fruits of harvest also began to emerge, and it was easy to see why many had worked hard to pursue their lifestyles there.

The residents also had a familiar rural identity, despite predominantly being left-wing ‘greenies’ in contrast to the “redneck farmers” that surrounded them (although for the most part, they got along fine). Many eco-villagers sought this identity intentionally – most had migrated from cities, and found the village pace of life attractive. However, Whakatipu was not just a village, but an intentional community. The principles of residents were diverse, as I will explore in this thesis. However, the stated purposes of the community, and thus of most residents, were a desire to practice permaculture, grow organic food, and enhance the biodiversity of their land. These core principles were outlined in an agreement attached to the titles of the individually-owned plots of land, which sought to ensure Whakatipu retained its purpose. It stated:

“Whakatipu Eco-Village:

- Will practise permaculture in a spirit of co-operation, mutual support and respect for one another and the land.
- Will preserve and enhance the native ecosystems on the land and in the sea around us.
- Will create fertile, holistically integrated agricultural systems, and a village culture that abundantly provides our community's needs for healthy living at all levels: physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual.
- Will do this sustainably, ethically, and with beauty and creative variety.
- Will be a positive part of the wider New Zealand society, especially as a model of sustainability and bio-diversity.

- Will be part of the wider global cultural evolution, giving and receiving knowledge, wisdom, inspiration, and love.”

(Whakatipu Community Agreements, March 2013).<sup>5</sup>

These principles were worked towards communally and individually; every household had its own gardens, and many had livestock. Community projects included replanting the peninsula, which had achieved a great amount of regrowth, and an orchard that annually supplied all members with a huge stock of organic apple juice.

The individualised ownership model set the community apart from a stereotypical ‘hippie commune’ organisation. Members all purchased a block of land, either from the overarching community company (defunct by the time of my stay) or an existing landowner. This also entailed buying-in to the community land adjacent to individual properties, which when I was there, all members had equal share in. The nature of this equal share had been debated, although the majority saw it as indivisible, meaning that every tree and blade of grass was owned equally. Some properties also had additional rented houses, meaning Whakatipu was home to many ‘non-members’, some long-term. They did not hold official shareholder status, but were integrated into the community. As such, I use ‘resident’ or ‘eco-villager’ to refer to anyone living there, but for instances where discussion of owner-shareholders is necessary, I use ‘member.’

When forming the community in 1997, prospective members needed financial means to buy in, which meant moving to Whakatipu was only viable for people with substantial capital. Thus, many original members present during my stay were in middle-to-later life, having established the community eighteen years beforehand *after* making money when they were younger. Many recently-joined members were also within this age group. While this presented challenges, Whakatipu continued to develop, and members planned for the community to remain active as the first generation reduced their involvement. When I was there, several subdivisions had recently allowed new members to buy in, including several young families. On top of this, Whakatipu emphasised hosting visitors, largely through international

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<sup>5</sup> These were written when the community was established in the late 1990s, but were periodically revised due to community decisions. March 2013 was when the latest revisions were made.

organisations such as Willing Workers On Organic Farms (WWOOF), which was how I arranged my stay.

Despite challenges during the previous two decades, including many of a social nature, Whakatipu was an established organisation, actively added new residents, and was eager to share ideas and practices with people from far and wide, including myself.

## **Aims and Relevance**

Given my desire to explore ecologically ethical lifestyles, I saw Whakatipu, and its purpose of pursuing sustainability, as a suitable community to research. By moving to an intentional community, Whakatipu's residents had made pursuing an eco-lifestyle a central focus of their lives; as such, I felt they could help me understand what doing this required, and whether others could do the same. I wanted to find out what it took to intentionally develop lifestyles that matched ethics, and what eco-villagers had experienced while attempting this. What kind of challenges had they faced? Had they experienced the disconnections between knowledge, ethics and practice that I did? What could their experience teach others (such as myself) who want to develop ecological lifestyles?

I use Bourdieu's theory of practice to explore these questions further, as it provides numerous concepts to widen discussion on how people's lifestyles and daily activities develop in relation to their personal motivations, abilities, and embeddedness within particular contexts. Eco-villagers lived within numerous overlapping contexts, which had a significant influence over how they developed eco-lifestyles. These contexts included the immediate environment of their peninsula, the local social network that they traded and interacted with, and the wider society that Whakatipu sought to be different from. Bourdieu's concept of habitus was central to exploring how living in these contexts affected the actions of eco-villagers, as it describes how people navigate their way through the world according to what is best for survival in various circumstances (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72). For Whakatipu residents, part of this was changing how they related to their immediate natural environment, to understand themselves as integrated and interdependent with their land. Smith (2001) and Haluza-DeLay (2008) term this an eco-habitus. Through encountering limitations from still living within wider society, eco-villagers had also developed strategies geared towards holistic living, and pragmatic decision-making.

These strategies helped them individually assess where compromise was required, and see their lifestyle development as a progressive undertaking, rather than through a success/failure binary. Utilising these strategies allowed the community to adapt and acknowledge, to some degree, eco-villagers' individualised navigation of what practices they could achieve.

This research contributes to a broader body of work exploring how to increase the sustainability of modern living. Understanding what has empowered and enabled people to make decisive changes in their lives, and live with a greater ecological consciousness, creates insight into promoting ecological lifestyles on a greater scale. As discussed in Chapter One, it is pertinent to utilize an eco-village to research this topic, because while my thesis contributes to literature on intentional communities, it also gives voice to people who are working the goal of societal change.

The key finding of my thesis, that there are numerous limitations that eco-villagers encountered when pursuing their ideal eco-lifestyle, is particularly relevant to an ongoing critique of pro-environmental behaviour literature. Research exploring the prevalence of a 'value-action gap' posits that there is an unexplained and irrational dissonance between people's stated environmental values, and how they knowingly act (usually when purchasing) in unsustainable ways. Often, this is then regarded as being a flaw of individuals who fail to act according to their ethics. However, critics argue that value-action gap research fails to account for the societal context that people live in, which compels them to live unsustainably (Carrington, Zwick, & Neville, 2016). My thesis illustrates that Whakatipu residents also felt limited in many ways from being able to completely achieve their ecological ideals, despite their concerted efforts. This further supports the argument that contextual, systemic limitations need to be given greater attention within research that seeks to understand pro-environmental behaviour. It also shows the need to think of ethical living as progress against the obstacles that limit individuals, rather than being defined simply by the categories of success or failure.

Considering ethical practice and consistency this way helped me understand my own limitations. I was initially naive, because I thought that as part of an established community, Whakatipu residents must have clear environmental philosophies informing clear-cut eco-lifestyles. I desired such direction for myself, to eliminate dissonance between my actions and beliefs. Rigid ethical practice now

appears unrealistic to me, and detrimental to further ecological living on an individual and societal level. How individuals relate to, and are shaped by, their societal and environmental contexts, has enormous bearing on what ethical living looks like and what is actually possible.

## **Thesis Pathway**

**Chapter One** outlines the literature relevant to this thesis, and introduces paradigms for researching eco-villages. Firstly, I present background research on intentional communities, describing the past aims of the movement, and how the modern eco-village movement has developed. I discuss how academic research has characterised these as ‘social change’ movements, but also argue that there are more nuanced types of change, such as personal, environmental and societal, sought by communities. I then explore recent trends in pro-environmental behaviour research to illustrate how this thesis contributes to critiques of ‘value-action gap’ theory, and why ethical action can usefully be thought of as ‘progress’ within context, rather than as ‘success/failure’.

**Chapter Two** presents my methodology. I describe how I found and contacted Whakatipu, and how this informed my project’s design. I then discuss processes for data collection, participant observation and interviews, and give an overview of my interview participants. Finally, I outline this project’s ethics, alongside challenges faced throughout the research process, and how these could have been mitigated.

**Chapter Three** discusses how I use Bourdieu’s theory of practice to analyse my data. After summarising how Bourdieu’s concepts create an analytical lens, I outline how I applied this to Whakatipu’s eco-lifestyle pursuit. Expanding on Bourdieu’s concept of field, I argue that consumer-capitalism strongly influences practice in society, and that this is what Whakatipu residents sought to critique. This is part of the broader discussion on how eco-villagers were connected to the contexts that they lived within; while consumer-capitalism was something eco-villagers wanted to change, they had to remain involved in it. I finish by discussing how Bourdieu’s ‘habitus’ lends itself to describing ethical progress, and was useful to apply in Whakatipu’s situation. Central to this habitus are the ways in which eco-villagers had sought a closer relationship with their immediate natural and social

environment, and the pragmatic and holistic strategies for navigating limitations that arose from Whakatipu's experience.

**Chapter Four** explores why eco-villagers wanted to develop eco-lifestyles and create change, and what enabled them to do so. This discussion illustrates how eco-villagers understood themselves in a societal context characterised by consumer-capitalism, aspects of which they found unethical. Through developing Whakatipu, they sought to create an alternative to that way of life. Residents intended to change how they lived and restore their immediate environment; some also intended to inspire change within wider society. However, they also relied on capitalism for their ability to change it – a paradox that will be explored further in later chapters. Individual understandings of ethical practice emerged, demonstrating how people developed their own responses to limitations according to their unique circumstances. I also show how permaculture gave residents a path to follow for their eco-lifestyle development, and provided methods to start living more ecologically.

**Chapter Five** describes how Whakatipu residents created eco-lifestyles, which led to change within their local environment, and also started to affect society beyond the community. Some key practices were established in the way that the community organised itself, such as egalitarian decision-making. Other practices supported the day-to-day creation of eco-lifestyles, such as food production, land management, and building/infrastructure. Residents reduced their reliance on mainstream provision, created a localised supply network that involved less market-based consumption, and attempted egalitarian social relations. These actions helped them develop a closer relationship with their immediate environment, and contributed to the development of an alternative to the mainstream system. However, many had experienced challenges in achieving these ideals. Disagreement over 'correct' ethical practice had arisen, particularly as some residents desired Whakatipu to present a united example of eco-living to wider society. While eco-villagers had developed more ecological living, challenges further illustrated reliance on the mainstream, and showed individuals had different practical responses to challenges.

**Chapter Six** brings together several themes from the thesis. Building on challenges described in Chapter Five, and mainstream reliance discussed throughout, I describe how and why eco-villagers could not completely achieve eco-lifestyles. Furthermore, the individual variation that arose in Whakatipu presented issues for co-

operative community development. However, out of the experiences and challenges encountered by residents, a ‘habitus’, or naturalised way of living, had emerged. Part of this was the way that eco-villagers sought integration with their local environment, while also acknowledging that this place was contained within a wider societal context defined by consumer-capitalism. Despite seeking to change wider society, eco-villagers could not completely reject consumer-capitalism, and the dynamics of wider society continued to affect what was possible in Whakatipu. Eco-lifestyle pursuit continued, however, aided by holistic and pragmatic strategies for day-to-day decision-making. These strategies arose out of the need to continue participating in consumer-capitalism while not agreeing with it. I argue these elements allowed for a continual navigation toward an ecological lifestyle, characterised by ethical progress rather than success or failure.

Finally, I **conclude** by summarising the findings of this thesis. I discuss what the experiences of Whakatipu contribute to our understanding of ethical living, particularly in a world that makes such living difficult, if not impossible. Key to this is my argument that habitus is an appropriate theoretical approach to ethics in a diverse and complex society. This is an effective way of considering individual responsibility around ethical practice, ensuring that the broader contexts in which individuals act are taken into account.



# 1 Research on Pursuing Ecological Living

There are two academic fields relevant to my inquiry: literature on intentional communities and eco-villages, and pro-environmental behaviour studies. Whakatipu is part of the global eco-village movement, but also follows in the tradition of New Zealand's earlier intentional community movement. Therefore, in this chapter, I discuss New Zealand's intentional communities and what the eco-village movement looks like on both a global and local (New Zealand) scale. This discussion also situates my thesis in the growing body of eco-village research. Eco-villages and intentional communities have been studied in the past for many reasons, including their efforts to bring about a different way of living. While intentional communities have largely been considered as social change movements, I appeal to other types of change that they seek, such as in local environments and personal lifestyles, so as to capture the diversity in Whakatipu. Within recent years, researchers have also argued for an expanded research focus on eco-villages, which utilises them as case studies for potential development in wider society, in areas such as environmental and social policy. I discuss how my thesis contributes to this focus.

As I use Whakatipu's experience to ask whether people can develop eco-lifestyles, I also provide an overview of pro-environmental behaviour research. Theorists have posited that increasing environmental knowledge leads to more pro-environmental behaviour; however, numerous studies have also documented a 'value-action' gap, whereby people do not act in line with their environmental convictions. While a gap is clearly observable, I discuss how critics argue that the 'value-action gap' paradigm lends itself to a flawed inquiry, and that it is necessary to understand ethical action within multiple contexts, which both hinder and support it. Smith (2001) and Haluza-DeLay (2008) provide such an alternative, as they discuss how Bourdieu's concept of habitus incorporates an appropriate consideration of how context affects actions. This is the lens that I use to explore Whakatipu residents' understanding of what it means to attempt ecological living.

## **Intentional Communities and the Eco-village Movement**

Whakatipu is part of the eco-village movement, a modern continuation of the intentional community tradition. Brown states that intentional communities represent: ...‘voting with the feet’ – a call to action that is personal and communal, bringing together the needs of the individual with those of other individuals, reestablishing the bonds that connect human beings but in a particular fashion. (2002b, p. 5)

Intentional communities deliberately construct lifestyles they feel are an improvement on the mainstream society around them. Brown calls this undertaking “cultural critique” (2002a, p. 153), and others regard intentional communities as social change movements, as they often mean to inspire change in wider society (Smith, 2002). Community members feel the need to “withdraw from larger society” because of issues with what society requires, or encourages; however, this withdrawal “occurs within the context of the larger society” (Brown, 2002b, p. 5). In some cases, connections to wider society are desired; in almost every instance, they are required.

Communities created in this sense are alternative societies with specific desired characteristics. They are commonly termed ‘utopian’, illustrating connection to More’s *Utopia*, which describes an idyllic state modelled on Plato’s *Republic* (Logan, 1983, p. 131). Pursuing self-sufficiency is often central for intentional communities that wish to sustain themselves as alternatives, another element found in utopian thinking (Logan, 1983, p. 138). This tradition was uniquely expressed within New Zealand’s 1960s/70s intentional community movement, and Whakatipu continues in this tradition, while also belonging to the contemporary global eco-village movement. As such, I discuss first the history of intentional community movement within the New Zealand context, and second the characteristics of the eco-village movement, both globally and locally in New Zealand.

### **New Zealand’s Intentional Community History**

Intentional communities have existed for over a century (Brown, 2002b), but their numbers peaked in Western nations during the 1960s and 70s, arising from that era’s social movements (Webb, 1999, p. 1). In 1970s New Zealand, communities flourished due to the government’s ‘Ohu Scheme’, which enabled “tracts of Crown land to be made available for groups of people who wanted to establish alternative

communities in rural areas” (Jones, 2011, p. 45). Aspects of counter-culture, including environmentalism, inspired many young people to pursue co-operative, land-based lifestyles, and the Ohu scheme demonstrated a degree of sympathy towards this within New Zealand society. Numerous works document motivations for founding these communities and the experience of living in them. One in particular, a memoir called *A Hard-Won Freedom* (Jones, 1975), was written as the author visited multiple communes around New Zealand. Several Whakatipu residents mentioned this book to me, as they viewed this movement as part of their heritage. Important historical research has also been conducted by Jenkin (2011, 2012), who was involved in a community during this period, while Jones (2011) provides a comparative sociological perspective of four communities.

These works argue that people joined these intentional communities out of disenchantment with urban living and what it entailed, desire for a simple rural life, and an interest in co-operative community. Alongside the Ohu scheme, Jones (2011) also argues that Māori communalism, the arrival of foreign nationals (particularly Europeans) attracted by New Zealand’s progressive environmental policy, and New Zealand’s colonial ‘pioneering spirit’, were influential on the movement. Pioneering self-reliance connected to an earlier New Zealand value of rurality over urban living, for both economic and ideological reasons. Quoting a commune member, Jones writes, “New Zealand is adolescent, bureaucratic [...] pubescent. We need a subsistence economy first and foremost”; that member later states, “We are on the boundary between the rural and urban areas. On one side we have the frontier of fascism and schizophrenia; on the other the parochial consciousness of the country” (1975, pp. 5, 7). Many of Jenkin’s (2012) participants connect their anti-establishment attitudes and desire for alternative community with anti-Vietnam war efforts, and dismay over their society’s direction.

Although locations throughout this period had unique identities, there were similar aspects in lifestyles across sites. While many communitarians desired simpler agrarian life, developing a community from scratch meant an initial struggle, where resources and buildings were often lacking (Jenkin, 2012; Jones, 2011; Jones, 1975; Webb, 1999). Community members did not always regard these rough lifestyles negatively, but some in wider society viewed members as homeless nuisances. Co-operative, physical work was necessary to start pursuing self-sufficiency.

Communities often started with an anti-capitalist emphasis, where members shared property, money and food, although many later reverted to individualist living (Jones, 2011; Webb, 1999). Demographics often depended on specific intentions when forming. Some communities had a Māori focus, others were invitation-only; many had members who had immigrated (Jenkin, 2012; Jones, 1975).

Subsistence activities such as organic farming, motivated by a desire for independence from mainstream society, were common. Jones states, “the soil is the basis of the economy in most communes” (1975, p. 63). Outlining diverse community identities, Sargisson and Sargent state that while some 1960s/70s communities were based on anarchist, co-operative and religious principles, most featured the “shades of green” prioritised in environmentalist communities (2004, p. 113). Given pre-existing aspects of New Zealand culture that influenced them, many of these communities continued to reflect, and further shape, specific aspects of New Zealand’s national identity, such as environmentalism and pioneering self-sufficiency. Sargisson and Sargent (2004, p. 11) argue that New Zealand itself was seen as a potential utopia for many arriving throughout the colonial period. Many intentional communities saw these values declining, and sought to re-emphasise them.

Some of New Zealand’s 1960s/70s intentional communities survived beyond that initial period, albeit in a reduced way. Webb’s (1999) anthropological study on several decades-old communities in the Coromandel region shows that while community life is difficult, continued functioning was possible. Many members still felt positive connections to the land and community (Webb, 1999, pp. 55-56); however, after 25 years, social tensions ran high due to lack of structure and formal co-operation, and this led to a reduced sense of ‘community’. Some people felt trapped there, as economic ties to the community made leaving difficult. Webb posits that communities survived because members compromised with the ideals they established the community with, and stayed committed despite conflict (1999, pp. 115-117).

New Zealand’s intentional communities, alongside those overseas, were therefore experimental, alternative societies, formed as offshoots of a wider movement which critiqued the lifestyles of the majority in wider society. Some re-emphasised specific aspects of New Zealand society, particularly environmental connection, and sought to critique other aspects, such as capitalist development.

While not all communities achieved the longevity and influence they set out to, they remain a noteworthy part of New Zealand's history.

### **The Eco-village Movement**

Eco-villages are a contemporary expression of societal critique, emerging from the 1960s/70s community tradition that Western nations experienced as a distinct global movement (Dawson, 2006, p. 11; 2013; Lockyer & Veteto, 2013, p. 4). In 1991, Gilman termed an eco-village as “a human-scale, full-featured settlement in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world in a way that is supportive of healthy human development and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future” (Greenberg, 2013, p. 270). Recognition of eco-villages as a global movement is usually traced to 1995, when the Global Eco-village Network was founded. As of 2014, this network contained 400 member communities, with a further 15,000 affiliated sites in the Third World (Litfin, 2014, p. 10). Eco-villages continue to critique many of the same aspects of society that earlier intentional communities did, although they have extended some critiques by incorporating contemporary understandings of human impact on the environment. Dawson (2006, p. 35) proposes that eco-villages, emerging in the wake of global neoliberalism, represent a new form of political activism extending beyond traditional protest. This characterises eco-villages as critiques of capitalism, something I expand on throughout this thesis.

Litfin (2014), a political scientist, presents a comparative study of fourteen eco-villages in six continents. These locations share characteristics with earlier intentional communities, including those in New Zealand. However, there are also new influences, including permaculture (the design system influential in Whakatipu) (Litfin, 2014, p. 36). They also incorporate other sustainability focuses developed in recent decades, such as lowering carbon footprints, restoring degraded environments, and reducing consumption. Litfin explores how numerous community identities and practices developed within distinct cultural and physical contexts. Among her studied locations are early pioneers Findhorn in Scotland, the spiritually focused Auroville in India (home to 2000 members), and urban reclamation projects such as Los Angeles Eco-village. Various locations also show differing attitudes toward wider societal integration. Litfin describes commonality between communities using two concepts. Firstly, eco-villages tend to emphasise “four windows into sustainability”, the necessary components for increasing sustainability. Abbreviated as E2C2, these are

ecology, economics, community and consciousness (Litfin, 2014, pp. 30-31). The second concept, “circle of life”, argues that eco-villages see human life as integrated within a wider ecological circle, with their actions effecting the entire planet (Litfin, 2014, p. 202). Other studies describe similar philosophies as holism (Kaspar, 2008).

Many eco-villages have been founded in New Zealand. Smith (2002) undertook an anthropological study with a recently-formed New Zealand eco-village, researching the question, “What are the motivating influences, values and social conditions that have drawn [...] Eco-Villagers to pursue a sustainable lifestyle in this community?” (2002, p. 4). Smith focuses on the reasons for developing the eco-village, and how the community’s identity formed through ideals interacting with challenges. Motivations for pursuing alternative practice within Smith’s community are similar to those in other intentional communities, primarily including a desire to leave the mainstream behind. While this study has similarities to mine, there are key differences. Smith analyses this sustainability pursuit as a gradual mobilization of long-held ethical values, enacted through collective group behaviour (2002, p. 32). He specifically focuses on pursuing sustainability through forming an eco-village community as a “nexus for change” (2002, p. 13). My study does not explore Whakatipu as such a community, but rather the practices members had developed, together and individually. Similar to what Jones (2011) and Webb (1999) observed, throughout Whakatipu’s lifespan, many residents reduced their emphasis on social ‘community’ development, becoming more focused on individual effort.

Smith conducted a sustainability-measuring exercise developed by the Global Eco-village Network with the eco-village, where members ranked their development achievements (2002, p. 58). This found “a good start towards sustainability” underway (2002, p. 49). I initially sought a similar evaluation, as I asked in interviews, “How have you defined what living sustainably looks like?” Whakatipu residents replied that no definition of measurable sustainability existed, and that after years of experience, they discovered complete sustainability was not possible. Therefore, I decided against evaluating sustainability. I am not negating Smith’s analysis, but rather illustrating that these responses influenced me to examine Whakatipu’s experience as a lifestyle pursuit that conflicted with an unsustainable context. People in Smith’s study felt they needed to be “unsustainable to be sustainable” (2002, p. 45); this contention, and the adjustments it necessitates for how

we consider ethical success, are also central to my study. Smith (2002, p. 56) concludes by discussing the community's struggles with individualised ethics, and questions whether this is resolvable in a community setting, which were beyond the scope of his thesis to explore. He proposes this could be explored within a more-established intentional community (2002, p. 57). Whakatipu demonstrated these individualised approaches, and also had, at the time of my research, existed for 19 years. Therefore, I was able to explore individualised approaches in an established community.

### **Challenges for Communities**

There are numerous challenges for developing intentional communities. Contemporary eco-villages continue to experience interrelated obstacles similar to those experienced by 1960s/70s intentional communities. These include an aging membership, problems with community decision-making, challenges for meeting goals, and having to maintain a relationship with mainstream society.

As mentioned, communities often decline after a period of time (Webb, 1999). Longevity beyond the initial group of members is hard to achieve, as demonstrated in Jenkin's (2012) census of New Zealand communities, where only eleven communities survived into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and forty-six did not. For many, this occurs due to a lack of new members, and they therefore become a group of aging people (Featherstone & Forster, 2000). This can limit what communities can accomplish, particularly if physical work is required. Egalitarian decision-making processes like consensus voting are also identified as a deterrent for new members (Jones, 2011).

Consensus itself is heavily critiqued within communities (Hong & Vicdan, 2016; Webb, 1999). Sargisson (2004) argues that while consensus presents a 'just' decision-making process, it can still be influenced by power within communities, leading to conflict and imbalance. Sargisson and Sargent (2004, p. 139) propose that while conflict is a productive force which can increase longevity, it puts stress on communities – 98% of their interviewees described intragroup conflict “as a source of personal pain and anguish” (2004, p. 144). In part, issues with consensus are fuelled by individual variations on what intentions actually are. While communities may establish themselves with explicit goals, interpretations of these can shift, or member's alignments to them change (Sargisson & Sargent, 2004, p. 171; Smith, 2002). As mentioned, Smith's (2002) participants discuss the challenges faced in



actually meeting their ecological goals, stating that pursuing sustainability seemed to inherently require unsustainable practice; in Webb's (1999) study, the tension this created led to conflict.

As intentional communities are established to pursue specific ideals, an obvious challenge arises when ideals are not met, or seen as beyond reach. Problems with consensus and co-operation relate to this challenge, as they represent an underachieved ideal, and can mean other goals go unachieved. Hong and Vicdan note, "To sustain the essentially transformative lifestyle, residents must constantly compromise and renegotiate conflicts between individual ideals and the reality of living in ecovillages, tensions caused by the required amount of sociality, and lack of macro-level co-operation" (2016, p. 130). This required compromise indicates that a degree of pragmatism often arises in intentional communities, in social and ecological decisions, so they can continue functioning. For example, Hong and Vicdan describe how in eco-villages they visited, self-sufficiency was "under-maintained, cheated, reduced, and under-achieved", which meant that "more pragmatic [...] governance mechanisms" had to be pursued (2016, p. 129). Likewise, contextual limitations mean that new practices may not fulfil expectations. Kaspar mentions a community who say they take "a pragmatic approach to ecological sustainability" when questioned about not being energy independent; in this instance, pragmatism emerges as members not placing unrealistic expectations on themselves (2008, p. 21).

Challenges to ideals are also presented by the extent to which communities retreat from mainstream life. Inevitably, despite goals of societal critique, communities must remain integrated in wider society, particularly economically. Brown (citing Janzen) states that earlier intentional communities all "tied their economic subsistence to that of the national community", which could be mutually beneficial (2002a, p. 174). Brown's studied community of Ananda in California contributed to the wider economy by co-operating with local businesses, while maintaining their ethical rejection of competition. Subsequently, Ananda survived, unlike other communities who removed themselves from society completely, and failed (2002a, p. 174). This illustrates the complexity of establishing a community intended to be different, but which cannot function in isolation.

I will discuss the economic requirements of eco-village living at length later, but note here that Dawson (2013, p. 227) sees intentional communities as



significantly harder to develop now, as opposed to during the 1960s/70s, due to land prices and planning regulations. This demonstrates how social class influences who can pursue eco-village living, particularly in the Global North. Baker (2013, p. 289) notes that in his studied eco-village, prospective members were often put off by the high entry costs.

Overall, Whakatipu experienced all of these challenges, albeit in different intensities to those described here, and I discuss how they influenced eco-lifestyle development there throughout the thesis.

## **What Do Eco-Villages Do?**

The environmental movement, which intentional communities and eco-villages are a part of, is broadly regarded as a social change movement (Haluzi-DeLay, 2008). Dawson, former head of the Global Eco-village Network, considers eco-villages an outworking of this social change movement, where values of 1960s/70s social movements continue to be acted upon (2013, pp. 220-223). This resonates with Brown's (2002a, p. 153) argument, citing Wallace (1956), that intentional communities are revitalisation movements, conducting "cultural critique". Wallace defines a revitalisation movement as "a deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture" and designates it "a special kind of culture change phenomenon" (1956, p. 265). Brown describes intentional communities' revitalisation as a backlash against "psychic discontent" generated by "complex societies, especially those moving away from an agrarian basis toward an industrial one" (2002a, p. 158). The environmental emphases throughout New Zealand communities described by Sargisson and Sargent (2004, p. 113) as "shades of green" provide an ecological critique of New Zealand society, undertaken by groups who have intentionally pursued lifestyles to match ethical ideals. Numerous intentional communities have attempted to shape society, and have provided practical guidance for multiple areas such as academia, policy and agriculture (Jones, 2011, p. 24). Eco-villages, including Whakatipu, often provide training programs and host visitors for this purpose (Kaspar, 2008). Due to these traits, researchers have largely considered social, or societal, change as a primary goal of intentional communities (Jones, 2011, p. 24).

However, this perspective now appears to reflect the idealism of what some in the movement desired, rather than what occurred. Jenkin states:

There is on-going tension between those who agitate for change and those who doubt if any ‘real’ change is possible. The hippies of the 1960s and the 1970s believed in social change. The 1980s saw a swing away from such progressive attitudes, the counter-culture’s focus moved to ‘personal growth’... (2012, p. 125)

The prediction of some in the 1970s, that intentional communities would lead Western nations and inspire new waves of rural living, never eventuated (Jones, 2011). Contributing to this is the ever-present paradox that despite remaining involved with society, commune residents seek social change by establishing a community with a deliberate degree of separation from the society they want to change (Brown, 2002b, p. 5). Dawson reflects this when he states, “most ecovillages [...] operate on the margins of the mainstream development debate” (2013, p. 223). Therefore, it is difficult to regard eco-villages solely as vehicles for social change, while their self-imposed separation from society suggests creating mainstream change is not always their *primary* focus. As I elaborate on in Chapter Two, residents expressed doubt over how I framed Whakatipu as a social movement on my information sheet. Some eco-villagers felt they failed at wider influence, while others did not desire any. Others, still, wholeheartedly agreed with this definition, and thought they succeeded at this goal to some extent. Disagreement over what influence Whakatipu seeks, a key point of individual variation, is explored further in Chapter Four.

Rather than consider eco-villages solely as a social change movement, I take an approach that, while encompassing some residents’ desire for social change, acknowledges a variety of other changes sought as well. Brown’s (2002a) characterisation of intentional communities as a cultural critique and revitalisation still applies, but in a more nuanced way than simply hoping to win wider society over to better living. Eco-villagers also enact their cultural critique by improving their land (particularly if it has been degraded by human activity) and changing how they relate to the natural world, and each other, especially if they seek to rid their lifestyles of the influence of mainstream practices and attitudes. Haluza-DeLay (2008, p. 206) describes this as “shap[ing] internalizations”, which echoes Jenkin’s statement on a personal growth focus (2012, p. 125). For some eco-villagers, including in Whakatipu, societal critique *does* mean influencing others in society toward lifestyle

change. These intentions crossover at times. Such consideration is necessary, though, to encompass the numerous, fluid intentions that individuals bring to eco-village living. In Chapter Three, I elaborate on these various forms of change, in a Bourdieurian way, as ways in which eco-villagers can shape their ‘fields’, or contexts.

The exact nature of what eco-villages critique can also vary. As referenced within the review of eco-village studies, members clearly seek holistic human relationships with the natural environment, particularly as a reaction to how such relationships are characterised within the neoliberal era (Dawson, 2006; Litfin, 2014). The critique, then, means rejecting and reconfiguring capitalist processes that characterise human-environment relationships in an un-ecological way. It can be difficult to see eco-villages critiquing capitalist practices while remaining partially involved in them, a paradox which is a central theme to my thesis. The subsequent actions that embody this critique therefore necessarily take many forms. However, there is another aspect of eco-village intention that explicitly establishes them as capitalist critiques:

...while they may not be explicitly anti-capitalist (although some are) – their assertion of self-determination, however limited and contradictory, however easy to ridicule and dismiss, represents a refusal of determination by others, and thus a refusal of the culture of capitalism. (Baker, 2013, p. 297)

Baker (2013, p. 295) views the political significance of eco-villages as shaping new lived realities, without using “state power.” Instead, he posits (citing Trainer, 2006) this movement intends to revolt against capitalism by “ignoring it to death, by turning away from it and building those many bits of the alternative that we could easily build right now” (2013, p. 295). This act is about trying to establish an alternative, self-sufficient ecological practice, which if successful, may appeal to others.

One way that eco-village members seek personal change is through developing a closer integration with their local natural environment, and the social networks that are supported by it. This then shapes the environmental change they try to develop. Such a connection is termed a ‘sense of place’ in both eco-village literature and environmental philosophy (Smith, 2001). “Place, for them,” states Kaspar, “is not just a house, a town, or a state. Rather, it is a living system within other systems, a process within processes” (2008, p. 22). Eco-villages therefore seek to understand their local environmental systems and social networks, and work with

them to create sustainable, self-sufficient lifestyles. This approach fosters a relationship where people are integrated with their environment, rather than just own the land and live on it (Kaspar, 2008). Interrelated to this understanding of environmental integration is decentralisation, another concept referred to in eco-village and permaculture literature. Largely popularised by the work of Schumacher (1993), decentralisation seeks to replace centralized, commercial supply networks with localized ones, based on nutrient flow<sup>6</sup> and bioregions<sup>7</sup> (Smith, 2001, p. 155). This understanding of environmental connection is radically different to predominant modern conceptions of natural environments being resources first-and-foremost (Smith, 2001, p. 163).

Change – in any of these senses – has been, and will continue to be, created through intentional communities and eco-villages. Direct social change, as noted, is the most difficult; there has not been wide-scale adoption of communal or eco-village lifestyles by the Western world, as some previously hoped for. Local environments, however, have changed, and eco-villages socially impact their wider local communities. Members continue to develop themselves, and offer ecological education to visitors and students. Studies also illustrate how intentional communities have influenced wider society around specific issues. Jenkin writes that intentional communities were instrumental “in spearheading anti-nuclear stances in New Zealand” (2012, p. 115). Jones (2011, citing Boal, Watts & Winslow, 2004) notes how intentional community-pioneered “organic food, environmental awareness, protocols for meeting and decision-making, sexual politics and child-rearing practices” were adopted by the mainstream. Several communities have been active in disaster cleanup and assistance (Dawson, 2013, p. 230). Looking forward, Dawson sees potential roles for eco-villages as experimental, well-established alternative societies, in “sustain[ing] society” should “government services falter and fail” in an environmental breakdown (2013, p. 230).

These ideas frame the diverse types of change that Whakatipu residents sought, the fundamental elements of their societal critique, and how they achieved

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<sup>6</sup> Nutrient flow refers to the way that water carries nutrients around land, and is something that can be harnessed to promote environmental health. I expand on this concept in Chapter Five, using eco-villagers’ discussion.

<sup>7</sup> Bioregionalism is a conceptualisation of watershed-based regions as units of ecological, social and political organisation. ‘Watershed’ refers to a region that contains a level of self-contained water-cycling. Water is a practical measure of a region’s health and productivity, so understanding that those in a watershed rely on the health of that water influences social relationships (Berg, 2013, p. 36).

change. Whakatipu was a community of individuals with individual approaches, pursuing eco-lifestyles that broadly constituted a critique of consumer-capitalism (a term expanded in Chapter Three). This practice was intended as a revitalisation, in the sense that there was a re-emphasis on past societal values that have declined. They also developed a closer relationship and integration with their local, natural environment, and nurtured social and economic relationships that depended directly on their land. Thus, their ethical intention itself was to create ecological change in their own lives, in their environment, and for some, in society. This change would not only meet their own ideals of healthier lives and healthier environment, but also shape the societal and environmental contexts they acted within to better support eco-lifestyles.

### **Expanding Application of Eco-village Research**

Much of the research discussed in this chapter, particularly from an anthropological perspective, seeks to understand intentional communities and eco-villages as socio-cultural phenomena – their structures, members, experiences, motivations, and connections to wider societal movements. Recent literature has also begun to explore how intentional communities can help make sense of wider societal challenges. Litfin's (2014) text is a good example. While she documents the eco-village movement, she concludes by discussing how their experiences and methods could be scaled up to help wider society become more sustainable. Other studies research eco-villages as case studies for wider objectives (Adalilar, Alkibay, & Eser, 2015). Hall (2015) explores how policy-makers could adopt key structures and values of eco-villages, such as conflict resolution processes and environmental development goals, to promote national wellbeing. Studies have also explored permaculture's relevance to policy, and whether principles practiced by eco-villages could shape alternatives to capitalist development in the Global South (Pyhälä, 2013).

This trend of expanding research's focus on eco-villages has extended to anthropology. Lockyer and Veteto (2013) argue that eco-villages are engaged in addressing aims, such as combating climate change, that academia is mutually interested in. Therefore, in addition to exploring the experience and phenomenon of intentional communities/eco-villages, they argue that anthropologists have the ability, and duty, to give wider exposure to such work:

[...] anthropologists must engage across disciplines and with practitioners around the world to pose, analyze, and refine viable possibilities, and in doing so, move beyond disengaged cultural critique... such work suggests that anthropologists can be co-creators, with engaged practitioners of our research projects, in the cultural process. (Lockyer & Veteto, 2013, p. 3)

Anthropologists can give a co-constructed voice to eco-villages, and help achieve these mutually recognised goals. Greenberg (2013) reinforces this argument, and states that eco-villages offer a practical action-based site for this exploration which academia could not develop alone. In this sense, by exposing the work of eco-villages, academia helps them achieve more change.

This thesis contributes to eco-village research that is not limited to exploring the eco-village in-and-of-itself. While an account of Whakatipu's lifestyle is present, it is part of a wider inquiry into whether individuals can live out ecologically ethical intentions in practice. As such, I now present an overview of contemporary pro-environmental behaviour research.

## **Pro-Environmental Behaviour Research**

Given my focus on Whakatipu's pursuit of eco-lifestyles and interest in understanding whether this experience could translate to wider society, I now look at what work has already been conducted in exploring pro-environmental behaviour and achieving ethics in practice. During recent years, given concern for the environmental consequences of humanity's behaviour, multiple research fields have explored the development of pro-environmental behaviour. While philosophy discusses the grounds for *what* environmental ethics should be, other disciplines examine the praxis of these ethics – that is, how those who understand the need for ecological living actually adopt environmentalism.

Education about environmental problems is key to increasing pro-environmental behaviour. People who hold and value knowledge about environmental issues are more likely to act in pro-environmental ways (Jagers, Martinsson, & Matti, 2014). To this end, research has been conducted on characterising people as ecological citizens (Bendik-Keymer, 2006; Scoville, 2016), and shifting societal discourse toward environmental concern (Blok, 2015). Various theorists have discussed reconfiguring 'community' and 'agriculture' conceptualisations, in the traditions of Peter Singer, Aldo Leopold, and Bruno Latour, to incorporate non-

human environmental entities and relationships (Fernandes & Guiomar, 2016; Kaspar, 2008; Sanford, 2011; Schrader, 2012). In this sense, ‘knowledge’ is not only understanding environmental degradation, but reconstituting how humans perceive their relationship with nature (Fernandes & Guiomar, 2016, p. 527). Fernandes and Guiomar argue that environmental degradation results from how evolution crafted mental processes, and that those who live according to a reconstituted understanding of human-environment relationship will represent an evolutionary leap (2016, p. 525).

This process of reconstituting human-environment relationships is similar to the way in which eco-villagers attempt to understand and integrate with their local environments. Some theorists point to Leopold’s observation of widespread estrangement from “the preconditions of one’s existence” (Scoville, 2016, p. 835), that is, the way modernity made interaction with life-supporting ecological processes redundant. Wendell Berry implicates the capitalist processes of “spatial mobility, economic and intellectual specialization, and [...] reliance on technology” as contributing to this disconnection (Scoville, 2016, p. 835). For both Leopold and eco-villagers, truly understanding integration with ecological systems occurs through practice. Scoville (2016, p. 835) states, “in order to take responsibility for one’s place in the biotic continuum, one must comprehend it, and in order to comprehend it one must first confront the preconditions of one’s existence in embodied terms.” This does not yet appear to have occurred within mainstream society to a meaningful extent.

### **The Value-Action Gap**

While knowledge, and restructured knowledge, is necessary to shift society toward ecological living, it is not sufficient. Research within psychology and consumer studies utilizes Ajzen’s Theory of Planned Behaviour (Mancha & Yoder, 2015) to explore how knowledge influences personal beliefs, values and identity, and how these attributes translate to consumption practices. While studies note higher rates of pro-environmental consumption among those identifying as ‘green’ (Whitmarsh & O’Neill, 2010), a fundamental finding has been that, in consumption activities, individuals do not completely act in line with their stated ecological values (Carrington, Neville, & Whitwell, 2010). This dissonance is conceptualized as the value-action (VA) gap, with research exploring why this gap exists, particularly as it contradicts prior research that posited knowledge led to behaviour change. Blake (1999) appears to have first articulated the gap (using slightly different terminology),



although Blok (2015, p. 926) notes similar dissonance discussed as early as Aristotle. VA gap literature struggles to identify the problem's causes. Various angles are examined, such as motivations that conflict with ecological morals (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002), along with the complex ways in which people develop identities through consumption (Bartels & Reinders, 2016, p. 444). Solutions for this dissonance are yet to appear, the reasons for which I explore presently.

VA gap research has become a prominent approach within the wider inquiry into pro-environmental behaviour, because it identifies and explores a clear barrier for sustainable living. However, numerous researchers have criticized this paradigm because it considers limited actions, and emphasises individual action instead of systemic change. Consumption and market participation are often the only actions of individuals explored for connection to values, which removes agency and characterises people primarily as consumers (Brochado, Teiga, & Oliveira-Brochado, 2017). One study refers to practices such as “spirituality [...] community [...] and family” as “activism [...] a temporary escape from the market” (Shaw, McMaster, & Newholm, 2016, p. 263). Others ask whether the VA gap results from deficiencies with green consumption options themselves (Johnstone & Tan, 2015; Olson, 2013). This narrow focus ignores other ways people can act out of their values, for instance, attempting to create lifestyles that reject purchasing and consumption. Additionally, in regarding the individual as entirely responsible for ethical action, VA gap research ignores how context enables or limits potential actions. Carrington et al. (2016) argue that this distracts from addressing the root cause of ethical dissonance, and the wider cause of unsustainable human activity. They reference similar critique from Žižek, who states, “In this way, guilt and responsibility are personalized – it is not the entire organization of the economy which is to blame, but our subjective attitude which needs to change” (2011, p. 22). Similarly, Haluza-DeLay (2008, p. 206, citing Bell), arguing that the effect of a “less-than-environmentally sound” context on action should take priority, states, “one of the main reasons people find their attitudes at odds with their behaviors ... is social structure. We do not have complete choice in what we do. Our lives are socially organized.”

Furthermore, critics argue that the consumerism discourse in VA gap research actually contributes to the problem it seeks to solve. By emphasising individualised consumption as the site of change, VA gap discourse supports the system that created



the current ecological crisis; it reinforces the context ignored by its analysis.

Carrington et al. articulate this issue as such:

This shortfall points to a much larger question [...] why are marketers continuing to discuss the persistence of the ethical consumption attitude–behavior gap in terms of individualized ethical flaws and internal moral shortcomings of consumers when it is more plausible to consider this gap as the precise expression of the systemic contradictions of contemporary consumer capitalism? (2016, p. 23)

Essentially, this contradiction presents the cause of the problem as the solution. As Žižek points out, “the very act of participating in consumerist activity is simultaneously presented as a participation in the struggle against the evils ultimately caused by capitalist consumerism” (2011, p. 356). This is a problem with the concept of eco-capitalism as a whole (Thompson, 2012, p. 895).

VA gap research therefore explores a ‘real’ problem, as people’s actions do not seem to match their beliefs about environmental issues. Such a gap could also be observed in Whakatipu, as residents there did not manage to completely achieve their ethical ideals. However, using this lens – which does not consider context – characterises those who compromise as constantly failing, and makes them responsible for that failure, as Carrington et al. (2016, p. 23) state.<sup>8</sup> Exploration of pro-environmental behaviour that considers context, and does not place all responsibility on individuals, necessitates more nuanced consideration of what successful ethical living is. Theory that does not reinforce the societal capitalist context creating the issue must be employed.

### **Reconsidering Ethical Behaviour Success and Failure**

Building on Bourdieu’s theory of practice, Smith (2001) and Haluza-DeLay (2008) propose a different paradigm for considering how individuals act out their ethics (or not), specifically in terms of ecological living. Smith (2001) outlines how current ethical discussion centred on success and failure only acknowledges the correctness of action in-and-of-itself, because of our culturally normative emphasis on rules. He states, “Theorists steeped in our legal-bureaucratic social ethos [...]

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<sup>8</sup> Baker (2013) also discusses the lack of contextual consideration in some intentional community studies which suggest community failure results from flaws in the community’s organisation. He points out that this is also places all responsibility on the individuals, and not systemic pressure from capitalism.

exaggerate the extent to which we consciously follow explicit rules. They take rules and laws as models for the operation of social processes because our society is itself rule-governed” (2001, p. 202). Rules present a rigid consideration of action as correct or incorrect. What is ignored, however, is how context may have assisted, or hindered, action. The context within which people attempt to live ecologically also involves systemic limitations that direct them toward consumerism and capitalism, and which influences their personal tastes and abilities.

Smith suggests rather than judging ethical success or failure regardless of contextual influence, navigation of contextual limitations can represent ethical expression: “Our moral identity is best understood in terms of inspiring, developing and sustaining an ethical *habitus* rather than a compliance with codes, rules, or conscious calculations of benefits and losses” (2001, p. 202). Smith uses Bourdieu’s term of *habitus*, which I explain in Chapter Three; for purposes of understanding here, this simply refers to strategies, wrought from experience, which create a way-of-being in the world. Bourdieu regards these strategies (largely unconscious, but able to be reflected on at times) as being context-informed; that is, they help an individual attain success by advising the best action within specific social and physical environments (Bourdieu, 1977; Haluza-DeLay, 2008). As such, a *habitus*-based understanding of ethics considers how individuals undertake their own ethical navigation, in relation to their contexts and subjective experience.

Smith (2001) and Haluza-DeLay (2008) also discuss the need for human integration with environment that Kaspar (2008) says eco-villages have, a relationship with a “socioecological location” which informs what ideal ethical practice is (Haluza-DeLay, 2008, p. 207). Haluza-Delay specifically describes eco-*habitus* as primarily resulting

...from the practices of living socially and ecologically well in place. Since *habitus* provides a [...] ‘feel for the game’ by being embodied in a particular place, we can understand an ecological *habitus* as an expertise developed from a ‘sense of place.’ (2008, p. 213)

Some necessary attributes for people are inferred here, such as understanding the need to integrate with the environment, how to do so, and having the desire and ability to do this. It is also a way of approaching environmental behaviour that does not regard ethics as existing separate from, or *a priori* to, the act of pursuing an eco-lifestyle;

rather, they are inherently practical (Smith, 2001, p. 204). As I discuss in this thesis, Whakatipu had established an integrated relationship with their local natural environment.

The other strength of using habitus to think about ethics is, as Smith (2001) states, it moves away from a rule-guided conception of success or failure, and focuses instead on an individual navigation of practice, depending on *what is possible* in various contexts. While Smith (2001) emphasises the need for developing practice that integrates with local environmental contexts, the same consideration can be applied to understand how practices form within societal contexts. In this way, exploring how ethical practice occurs as a habitus interacts with a society shows how contextual influences limit ethical behaviour, or require unethical actions of people for survival. The societal context that habitus allows people to navigate has multiple influences on practice, many of which inhibit ecological living (Haluzá-DeLay, 2008). However, ecologically-driven pursuit of the best options (which can change, as context itself changes) allows individuals to achieve what Singh (2014, p. 179) terms the “higher regions of the self.” In moments where ethical living can be advanced, “nobility” can be found, a term described by Singh as not indicative of objective “good”, but rather a “[coordinate] within which [...] life forces flow and wax and wane” (2014, p. 180). Such a process must be understood as occurring at an individual level, in different intensities, for those in Whakatipu, and in wider society.

## **Conclusion**

Intentional communities have long been a significant movement of societal critique, and have particular heritage within New Zealand. While they have faced many challenges to their desired way of life, and have not necessarily achieved their goals of societal change, they have influenced numerous areas of public thought. The global eco-village movement continues in this tradition, seeking to critique capitalism as earlier communities did, combat contemporary environmental and social issues, and be a source of education for society. Due to the concerted efforts of eco-village members to create alternative lifestyles, ethnographic engagement with them furthers our understanding of ecologically ethical living. Ethnography allows for eco-villager-led exploration of this, and gives voice to the community’s pre-existing efforts to create pro-environmental change and develop alternatives to capitalism. The aims of my thesis, of asking how to develop eco-lifestyles that match intentions and address

challenges for doing so, were ideal to explore among eco-villagers who have dedicated their lives to developing ethical practice.

Researching ecological living within an eco-village reinforces the important role of knowledge in developing eco-lifestyles, while showing that knowledge alone is insufficient, as ideals remain underachieved. This research also reiterates criticisms of VA gap discourse, as a capitalist society continually affects the ability individuals have to act how they want to, even if they try to act outside of this society. Therefore, a different way of exploring how individuals make ethical choices is required, one that acknowledges context, and that does not place all responsibility for aligning ethics with practice on individuals. The idea of eco-habitus presented by Smith (2001) and Haluza-DeLay (2008) emphasises how context affects lifestyle, and describes how individuals can continually progress toward ethical goals despite having to make compromises. This accounts for individual abilities, and individualised approaches, in pursuing an eco-lifestyle despite experiencing a gap between actions and ethics. As Singh (2014, p. 179) describes, this is success, or “nobility”, in-and-of itself. The following chapter outlines the methodology for constructing this research.

## 2 Methodology

This chapter discusses my methodology. I start with how I found Whakatipu, and subsequently designed the project. Secondly, I outline the methods used to conduct the fieldwork, which involved participant observation and interviews. I then give an overview of my interview participants. Lastly, I present the ethics process that I undertook, and a discussion of challenges I faced throughout the research.

### Finding Whakatipu and Designing the Project

Prior to this project, I had no experience with eco-villages. I began preliminary research by searching for ‘New Zealand Eco-villages’ on Google. Several locations around New Zealand appeared on the first results page, including Whakatipu. While I explored several communities’ websites, Whakatipu’s longevity (having been established in 1996) gave a sense that the community was stable. As discussed in Chapter One, some New Zealand intentional communities have not maintained stability, and multiple issues have plagued other eco-village projects.<sup>9</sup>

Whakatipu also emphasised individualized living situations. Many other eco-villages strongly presented communal philosophies that residents needed to comply with, such as mandatory shared community meals and shared housing. This indicated ideals carrying over from earlier 1960s/70s intentional communities. Conversely, Whakatipu featured individualised projects within a larger community. This model appeared to have more applicability in our current individualised society, and the potential of wider appeal. As discussed in Chapter One, some Whakatipu residents felt this commune heritage was important, and some had lived in earlier communities. Others openly expressed contempt for these communities, which they described as “first-in, best-dressed”. The general attitude about such communities appeared in a humorous exchange during Logan and Rose’s interview, a couple who met in a now-defunct urban commune:

*Rose:* So everybody there was renting, nobody was the owner, and they were all young, poor and artistic – all into healing, or...

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<sup>9</sup> One location in the South Island has experienced numerous development and financial issues, among other controversy, publicly reported by former residents (Anderson, 2015; Anderson & Arnold, 2015; Goodger, 2010). Another was founded on the site of the controversial Centrepoint community in 2000, following Centrepoint’s dissolution; in 2009, the property was sold to a Yoga retreat organisation (Jones, 2008; Kawai Purapura, 2015).

*Logan:* All crazy, yeah.

Whakatipu's website indicated some members accepted visitors under the WWOOF scheme, a program which connects backpackers with hosts on organic farms to trade work for board and food. This seemed like an ideal way to conduct participant observation, provide my participants with a return in the form of labour, and use pre-existing pathways into the community. WWOOF was simple to use – for \$40, I created an annual membership.<sup>10</sup> I sent an introductory email to three listed hosts in Whakatipu, outlining my project. I quickly received one positive reply, and made a WWOOF booking nearer the start of my research period. Later, I called a second host who, quickly showing interest, also agreed to take me. This established Whakatipu as a viable research site, and there was no need to look for another.

Early in planning, I saw advantages in having multiple hosts. Having at least two hosts would ensure there was no dominant perspective from one particular household in my research, and that I could avoid being seen to have allegiance with them. As the community practiced gardening, I considered there might be variation in activity and experience between seasons, and therefore planned to make two trips in different seasons. I proposed this in my initial introductory email, and received a positive response. One trip was thus conducted in July of 2015 to experience winter, and the next in September of 2015 for spring. While I did see variation, my hosts stated most visitors see greater variation after spending an entire year in Whakatipu, particularly as summer, the main harvest time, contrasts with the rest of the year. This reflects the value of a fundamental principle of Malinowskian participant observation, that at least an entire year in the research site is needed to really understand the shape of life, via experience of the annual cycle (Malinowski, 1922, pp. 7, 22; Marcus, 2009, p. 5). This was, however, beyond the scope of an MA thesis.

There were several factors that determined how long I spent in Whakatipu. Splitting trips between seasons, with a gap in the middle for transcription and writing, seemed suitable. Initially, I planned two three-week trips, but this had to suit my hosts, who both offered me a weeklong stay, one after the other, for my first trip in July. From that point, I then arranged with them both to repeat the same arrangement in September. While this amounted to less time than I originally planned for, and

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<sup>10</sup> This allowed me to make an online profile that potential hosts could view, to ascertain my suitability to their work from a personal description, and reviews from previous hosts. More information can be found at <http://www.wwooof.co.nz/>

made for busy fieldwork periods incorporating both participant observation and interviews, I collected an enormous amount of data. Overall, this design provided a great deal of exposure to the eco-village's practice, and extensive input from those I met about their lifestyles and perspective on living there.

## **Fieldwork**

### **Participant Observation**

This project was ideal for site-based participant observation, because the community had a permanent location where they conducted their activities. Musante (2014, p. 251) writes, "Participant observation is considered almost universally as the central and defining method of ethnographic research." While other ethnographic methodologies have gained prominence in recent years, site-based participant observation as originally popularised by Malinowski (1922) remains integral to anthropological study (Okely, 2015, p. 129). This method gave insight into the residents' everyday practice, particularly because as a WWOOFer I worked alongside them. It also helped me understand what residents discussed in interviews, because I had my own (albeit limited) experience of their lifestyle. I worked, for the most part, with my two host families on their projects; as such, they were the primary residents with whom I conducted participant observation. The first were John and Katherine, and the second were Erich and Philippa. There were also several instances where I worked for another resident, Gerrald, or for the wider community.

The split-trip design functioned as intended; it was pertinent to be involved in planting during my first trip, and harvesting that crop during my second, as I experienced the results of earlier work that I had done. Through this, I experienced how the community's work never ceased, as development of building, gardening and lifestyle was always occurring. This continued post-fieldwork, as I have since seen more development of building projects that I helped with in Facebook posts.

Taking field notes was central to participant observation; they are regarded as a tangible result of this methodology (Musante, 2014, p. 274). My notes mostly took the form of diary entries, where I recorded important events, activities, insights, conversations, thoughts, and personal reactions. I made one entry every few days, as day-to-day events were similar due to repeated work, and often took on greater meaning after a period of reflection. At points, I attempted to take notes during the

day, to record observations and conversations as they occurred. On the first day, I attempted this on a touch-screen phone whilst pruning trees. Suffice to say, this was an immensely inconvenient and unrealistic approach. However, in free moments, or during meetings I observed, it worked better. My field notes became a starting point for analysis. During thesis writing, I returned to these notes, and was reminded of events, first impressions, or lines of thought that I had forgotten since returning home. These influenced my analytical direction, and how I interpreted interview transcripts.

## **Interviews**

Ideally, I would have contacted all Whakatipu residents prior to arriving, to discuss my research intentions and extend interview invitations. In this situation, however, asking for every resident's contact details from potential WWOOF hosts would have been intrusive. Instead, I waited until I was in Whakatipu to gauge whom I should interview and what questions I should ask. This proved wise, as there was much more diversity – in philosophies, actions and living arrangements – than I expected. In my initial visit, I used the first three days to get my bearings, and build rapport with my hosts. My first hosts, John and Katherine, became my principle informants to some extent, informing me of Whakatipu's history, and the current state of relationships. They gave me the names of all residents, along with their living arrangements and locations, and advised me how to contact them. I then worked out who would be suitable to interview, and who would likely be uninterested in taking part. Some, for example, had limited English, were reclusive, estranged, not always present, or simply living in the community but disinterested in the ideals.<sup>11</sup>

This helped establish my interviewing plan. John and Katherine identified thirty of the thirty-eight residents as likely to be interested in an interview, and able to respond comfortably in English. I interviewed eighteen of the thirty-eight eco-villagers, including two who initially were not on my list. Others were not interviewed for several reasons, including a lack of time on either of our behalves, or a lack of opportunities for me to connect with them.

I recruited interviewees organically using snowball sampling, starting with residents close to my hosts, as they often spent time together. This expanded my

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<sup>11</sup> 'Disinterested' individuals were few. They were members who had initially bought in, but were now only tied to the community via this investment. They may have occasionally visited Whakatipu, but also had a residence and livelihood somewhere else.



understanding of the eco-village's social networks, and allowed me to make more connections. My first trip mostly included the interviews set up this way, and these encounters led into interview plans with others for my second trip. This was another instance where the dual-trip design proved helpful. I made sure I was a familiar face around Whakatipu for several days before approaching people. On my first day, there was a community lunch attended by many eco-villagers, which was helpful. I also mowed the lawns for my host's parents, which established me visibly as a willing worker in the community. I attempted as much as possible to spread information about my project, via information sheets, in advance of set interview times.

While I had loosely planned questions, I developed these further as I worked out what residents found important. John and Katherine discussed the experiences they thought were relevant to my research during my first three days with them, which informed my main points of exploration. Before my first interview, with John and Katherine, I constructed leading questions for a conversational interview, which consisted of a framework to create conversation, and elicit responses around specific events or beliefs (Atkinson, 1998, p. 41). Some questions assumed a greater level of commonly-held perspective among residents than actually existed; this problem with pre-meditated questions is recognised in anthropology (Okely, 2015, pp. 132-133). However, the fluid conversation format, more often than not, allowed responses to develop naturally, and for me to change the direction of questions if they were irrelevant. Appendix A provides a list of questions that I asked during interviews.

This led to different conversations for different people. After I interviewed my first renting eco-villagers, I learned that reasons for living in Whakatipu were broader than I'd previously thought, which required different questions. This reflects the need for "reflexive reflexivity", as Bourdieu (1996, p. 18) calls the ability to "...perceive and monitor *on the spot*, as the interview is being carried out, the effects of the social structure within which it is taking place." In my case, this meant awareness that my ideas on how participants saw eco-living were not always accurate, and that asking questions related to my perspective would create misrepresentation. This showed the necessity of adapting my initial questions to different situations, and following on in a conversational manner (Atkinson, 1998, p. 42).

I informed participants that interviews would last one hour, and if we approached that time in full conversation, I verbally obtained permission to continue.

This was almost unanimously given. Several interviews naturally ended early, while some participants excused themselves, often needing to work. Around half the interviews were with couples, discussing perspectives on life journeys, motivations, and their current activities simultaneously with both partners. This allowed ideas to be compared and contrasted. John and Katherine also encouraged me to carry my recorder at all times, and record conversations, when with them. This was equally to stop me missing useful information as it was to avoid having me ask them to repeat themselves for recording. I transcribed all interviews in full.

## **Participants**

As mentioned, I had a total of eighteen participants. This section gives a general idea of who Whakatipu's residents are, and provides context for understanding interview responses.

The residents I interviewed were mostly middle-aged (40-65), with several either side of that demographic also. This mix was fairly representative of Whakatipu's other residents. Original members had moved to Whakatipu around twenty years ago, and many are now retired (or approaching retirement). Many arrived as families and had children grow up there, some of who periodically return. Overall, this demographic showed similarity to what Jones (2011) describes about communities becoming older and not finding new residents; some in Whakatipu were worried about becoming a "retirement village". I also interviewed several younger eco-villagers between the ages of 20-40, some of whom were recent arrivals, which showed there was some new interest in the community.

The two predominant ethnicities were Pākehā and European, the latter featuring several different nationalities, including German, Swiss, Belgian, and Dutch. There were two Asian residents, from China and Thailand. Cultural identities played a part in the backgrounds that led residents to the community. Many Europeans had specifically arrived in New Zealand to pursue sustainable or intentional community lifestyles, some after hearing about plans for Whakatipu. This has been common in New Zealand's intentional communities (Jones, 2011). Many residents, both Pākehā and European, had experienced other intentional communities, and some built connections there that actually led to Whakatipu forming. Cultural difference has contributed to challenges within the community at times, although eco-villagers generally reflected positively on learning about each other over the years.

Gender in the village was roughly an even male/female split. Within my interviews, participation was more skewed, with twelve males and six females. All but one of my participants had partners; while several were interviewed together, several men gave solo interviews, as their female partners were not as keen to take part, or were unavailable.

A key point of difference between residents was whether they were owner-members, or renters. Owners bought into the community, with their own plot of land and indivisible shares in communal land. Many sections had more than one house, so there were also several renting residents. Renters were mostly active in community life, and did their own gardening. They were not involved in the community decision-making that members were. Some renters wanted to buy into the community when they had money to do so. Others were content renting in what they felt was a friendly, rural community. Three interview participants were renters.

Another difference was between original residents and newer arrivals. This appeared differently for every individual, but often emerged as original residents discussed what it was like 'in the beginning', contrasting to newer residents who described arriving in an established community. Some original residents discussed those who had moved on, and the impact they had. Newer members were also not part of establishing the community's intentions. They were aware of these values when they arrived, due to the written agreements; however their relationship to these values has sometimes been more distant (although, every member has their own perspective on the agreements). At the time of research, some newer members were still settling into their new properties. Ten interviewees were original eco-villagers.

Very little can be generalised about *all* residents; what can be stated, however, is that by belonging to Whakatipu, they were pursuing a lifestyle different to what they had prior to moving to the eco-village. Their belonging to this community meant that common ground existed to that extent.

## **Ethics and Challenges**

This project did not entail major ethical concerns, and as such, required a low-risk notification from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee. While there were children in the community, neither my participant observation nor interviews involved them. As previously noted, written consent forms were obtained for all recorded interviews.

I anonymize Whakatipu to maintain the community's privacy. I did not expect this research to be controversial; it is not an exposé of the community, but rather an exploration of how people have, as individuals and as a group, pursued eco-lifestyles. Individual pseudonyms are also for privacy, and not for anonymity within the community, as residents will be able to tell who said what. At times, residents shared views that were controversial within the community, referring to conflict or contested perspectives. Where such excerpts contribute to my discussion, I do not include a name, so that neither the speaker nor target is identified.

### **Non-Ethics-Related Challenges**

A challenge in any anthropological research is that when initially outlining a research topic, group, and question, the researcher forms assumptions about the people whose participation they seek, and the situation they are entering into. One such instance, illustrated by comments when first meeting my hosts, was that Whakatipu was not the tight-knit community I had anticipated. No divisions stopped anyone from interacting with me, but I had to ensure I presented myself neutrally. While this seems an obvious obligation, opinions of me could have been influenced by who I stayed with. I feel I succeeded here, evidenced by openness to my interview requests, appreciative comments about my neutralising presence in community meetings, and semi-joking suggestions that I return as a 'community mediator'.<sup>12</sup>

My time in Whakatipu was overwhelmingly positive, and I received a warm welcome wherever I went. However, it is worth reflecting on Bourdieu's (1996, pp. 18-19) discussion of the "slightly arbitrary intrusion" that interviews present; "symbolic violence" that can be limited, but not eradicated. Being a young, inquisitive WWOOFer, at times I felt I was intruding into the time and space of busy residents, some of who were unaccustomed to strangers seeking them out in this secluded locale. I mitigated this by presenting my research intentions; when I mentioned my interest in examining activities like permaculture to them, one resident stated, "Oh, absolutely, always keen to promote this stuff."

One ongoing challenge was the formality of information sheets and consent forms, which some residents tended to view with disdain – as one put it, "PC stuff." Many eco-villagers shared an underlying culture of favouring goodwill and trust as

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<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, this is actually something that other anthropologists studying eco-villages have done (Baker, 2013).

agreement security over formal written agreements where possible. Informal agreements had, however, been challenged in recent years, and subsequent contractual agreements were disparaged. I navigated negativity around consent forms and information sheets by treating them as an obligation to myself as well, and assuring residents that I would not misrepresent information shared with me. In hindsight, my information sheet should have been more accessible. While I sought to keep it jargon-free, some terms were not as neutral as I thought. My description of Whakatipu as a social movement divided opinion; one respondent asked doubtfully, “Is that what we are?” while another confidently stated, “Well, you’ve come to the right place.” Some felt the project’s working title, “Turning from our Wicked Ways”, had inappropriate religious connotations, so I subsequently changed it. I also chose a small font to (ecologically) save on paper, but did not realise this was detrimental for anyone with less than 20/20 vision. These elements did not negatively impact the research, but were short sighted, and in some respects, inconsiderate to my participants.

Wwoofing was useful to gain entry to Whakatipu and conduct participant observation, but occasionally conflicted with interviews. Work hours often meant that I had restricted time for interviewing. In one instance, I worked with my hosts at a project until dusk, and returned to their residence without much evening left. I went to meet my interviewee, only to realise I didn’t know where he lived, and thus, lost walking in complete darkness, I returned empty-handed. I felt unable to rectify the situation, as it was late, and that member was leaving on a trip the following day. Ultimately I obtained enough interviews, but this shows how potentially clashing methods need to be balanced, and some may claim priority over others at times.

## **Conclusion**

This project utilised a traditional, site-based anthropological methodology, which I was privileged to undertake at a Master’s level. I am incredibly thankful to my hosts, who allowed me to conduct participant observation with them; this, alongside interviews with a diverse group of Whakatipu’s residents, provided me with a wealth of information about pursuing eco-lifestyles. Their stories and perspectives, along with *our* experiences (separate and collective) have produced the narrative that unfolds in the following chapters, and I hope we collectively benefit from its analysis. The next chapter presents the theoretical framework I use to analyse the data elicited by this methodology.

### 3 Theorizing Eco-Lifestyles

In this thesis, I use Bourdieu's theory of practice as the lens for exploring what motivated and enabled eco-villagers to pursue eco-lifestyles. This theory also provides a tool to understand how individuals determined what practices to pursue, with the concept of 'habitus'. In adapting this framework to the case of Whakatipu, specific considerations were needed, such as how interacting with multiple contexts affected lifestyle; to this end, I specifically outline Whakatipu's relationship with the consumer-capitalist ideology present in wider society, and how this influenced residents. Finally in this chapter, I outline how this theoretical framework incorporates Smith (2001) and Haluza-DeLay's (2008) discussion of ethical living as a continual navigation of practice, made possible by habitus.

#### **Bourdieu's Theory of Practice**

Bourdieu's theory of practice consists of numerous interrelated concepts used to describe how and why practice occurs, and to interpret worldviews by analysing practice. Several of these concepts are useful for exploring my research questions, including habitus, disposition, capacity, and field. These concepts show what influences lifestyle, how actions shape context in particular ways (and vice-versa), and how strategies emerge to guide practice.

'Habitus', the central concept in Bourdieu's theory of practice, comes from the same root word as 'habit', and therefore involves repeated bodily action. Hage describes habitus as "fitness to meet the challenges that a specific social milieu throws at you by the mere fact of your living and evolving in it" (2014, p. 145). Bourdieu states habitus is "history turned into nature", a specific 'way of being' in the world that is continually reinforced due to the success it gives whilst navigating complex situations in life (1977, p. 78). As such, it is a "strategy-generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72). Practice is a central part of these strategies developing at both individual and group levels. Habitus typically develops within social divisions, such as class, due to closely shared attributes derived from similar experiences (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 81). As such, habitus can demarcate divisions between groups defined by possessing similar perspectives on living in a 'field' (which, as I describe soon, is the context in which we act). However, individuals often develop variations on their wider group habitus.

The agency that people have in regards to strategy is complex; quoting Elster, Bourdieu (1990, p. 48) states, "...we are as much automaton as mind," inferring that people are not always aware of what they do. As such, habitus mostly develops unconsciously, as Haluza-DeLay notes, "Habitus is a set of embodied rather than consciously held dispositions" (2008, p. 207). Smith similarly argues these strategies should not be seen as "consciously formulated limits on social action [...] but as ideologically incorporated, open-ended, and flexible dispositions to act in certain ways" (2001, p. 199). However, habitus involves factors that we can be aware of, especially if practice is conducted intentionally. Individuals can potentially reflect on experiences and consider what behaviours they are adopting to help achieve desired practice in the future. Haluza-DeLay makes particular note of habitus strategies becoming recognised for those pursuing alternative lifestyles, saying they "will need to be creative and explicit, since [this] appears illogical to the dominant social field's existing logics" (2008, p. 213). Undertaking practice shapes habitus, which continually advances our lives according to what promotes success within our 'field'.

Habitus, and the practice that spurs its development, forms in relation to two other interrelated attributes: disposition and capacity. Disposition describes inclination toward particular actions. Bourdieu states the term:

...expresses first the result of an organizing action, with a meaning close to that of words such as structure; it also designates a way of being, a habitual state (especially of the body) and, in particular, a predisposition, tendency, propensity, or inclination. (1977, p. 214)

'Motivation' is also implicated, as disposition is a driving force to achieve something. Bourdieu also states that dispositions are "inculcated in the earliest years of life," and "cultivated [...] inscribed in the bodily schema and schemes of thought" by pre-existing contexts that individuals are born into (1977, p. 15). Dispositions constitute what we see as the 'best' lifestyle, and how we desire to exist in the world. Achieving that 'best' is what habitus directs toward.

Habitus also incorporates our capacity to achieve action. Capacity is a person's ability to act, and manifests in the available resources, or 'capital', at our disposal to shape the world in our best interests. Similar to disposition, capacity is largely determined by the context within which we are raised, which provides knowledge through experience, and our socioeconomic position. Hage also argues



human biology provides capacity, such as physical fitness required to undertake tasks (2014, p. 146). While mostly unchosen attributes like social position or physical makeup establish a basic capacity, our potential for action involves continued interaction between individual capacities and field structures (institutions or cultural practices, for instance). Some of these are observable, while others are not. These complex interactions stop the theory of practice from being deterministic. Rather, disposition and capacity constantly interact with context to produce “particular case[s] of the possible,” which vary for every person (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 63). These form the experiences that shape our habitus, so that when encountering new situations, we possess strategies that allow us to make the best of them.

Field, already mentioned several times, describes the context where individuals and groups are situated. It also involves the “configuration of relations between actors and their relative positions”, or the ways that people, places and things interact and understand each other, and exert power over one another (Haluza-DeLay, 2008, p. 206). This defines context as socially constructed, as it is not just the physical environment, but also the social and cultural ‘structures’ that inform interaction and practice there. Structure refers to an institution, or method of practice, which exists beyond individual action. Permaculture, eco-villages, and capitalism, for instance, are all relevant structures for Whakatipu. Structures have varying influence over practice, but some are so widely adhered to that they constitute ‘orthodox’ practice (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 164, 169). These remain questionable, with conceivable alternatives, but nonetheless present a default mode of living for most in the field. Typically, most individuals subscribe to the socialised rules that orthodox structures present, and Bourdieu states that those who question and act against them are usually deemed “troublemakers” (1990, p. 98).<sup>13</sup> These rules exert power over what dispositions are successfully expressed, and how. Habitus is typically regarded as providing individuals with the best “fit” in their field (Haluza-DeLay & Berezan, 2013, p. 140). As such, Bourdieu regarded habitus as conservative, meaning that it usually shapes individuals to fit the orthodox field, not vice-versa. However a disposition to shape the field differently may allow a new habitus to flourish (Haluza-DeLay, 2008).

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<sup>13</sup> A closely related term, “doxa”, refers to structures that are taken for granted and exist beyond the realm of public discourse (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 168). These are not as readily questionable as orthodoxy, because they are invisible to almost all actors in the field. For the purposes of this thesis, I apply the term orthodoxy as opposed to doxa to explore ‘consumer-capitalism’, as while this structure is extensively adhered to, it is not beyond criticism within public discourse.



It is important to consider how disposition, capacity and field interact with one other throughout the lives of individuals, forming new dispositions and capacities. For instance, an eco-villager's social position at birth may have provided capacity to experience gardening, the financial means to do so, and a family culture that 'inculcates' a disposition toward valuing the environment. That individual may have then interacted with the structure of a permaculture course because of their disposition, an education which increased capacity. Such a capacity growth could have led to a new disposition, as new options for 'best' actions appeared. Field constraints would still apply, but the eco-villager's practices may have begun to shape the field to be more conducive to achieving further practice. Describing this relationship, Bourdieu states:

The principle of practices has to be sought [...] in the relationship between external constraints which leave a variable margin for choice, and dispositions which are the product of economic and social processes that are more or less reducible to these constraints, as defined at a particular moment. (1990, p. 50)

Habitus is shaped by the experiences that occur throughout this progression.

Therefore, dispositions provide goals for practice, capacities provide means to achieve them, and habitus creates strategies to navigate what should be practiced within the field, and increase likelihood of success. However, practice guided by this process has a further impact, as it shapes the field, or context, to make that repeated practice more possible. Building on Bourdieu's (1991, p. 221) description of how the social world is made and unmade, Hage argues that through cultural, social and economic action, individuals conduct 'world shaping' (2014, p. 151). The more invested groups of people are in a practice – business, for example – the more established that practice becomes within the field. This practice may become a structure, or even orthodox, if significant numbers of people engage in it. This shapes the field physically (as business impacts on the existing environment) and socially/culturally (as people's perspectives and relationships are characterised by that practice). Such field transformations would make further business activities easier, thus strengthening the cycle. This process makes the world more conducive to some practices than others – Hage states there are "dominant and dominated people within a reality, but just as, if not more, important [...] dominant and dominated realities" (2014, p. 152). Habitus guides the practice that creates this context-shaping, and thus

contributes to the process. However, depending on the challenges and resistance faced in attempting practice (particularly if dispositions are unorthodox, and unsupported by the field) the habitus aids in addressing and mitigating challenges.

## **Relevance of Bourdieu's Theory to the Current Study**

Bourdieu's theory of practice was useful for exploring eco-lifestyles in Whakatipu. While I wanted to inquire about eco-villagers' experiences of pursuing these lifestyles, Bourdieu's theory also provided tools to understand numerous factors that shaped practice, and what happened when desired actions were not possible. Ideas around dispositions and capacity promoting actions resonated as residents discussed why they chose to pursue eco-lifestyles. Many eco-villagers described their motivation for developing ecological practice emerging from formative experiences, which they regarded as the start of ecological consciousness. Residents were also quick to outline the financial capacity that enabled them to pursue their dispositions by establishing the community, and some then reflected on what this meant for the ability of others to live in a similar way.

Incorporating the idea that individuals interact with the field when conducting practice, and Hage's (2014, p. 151) expansion of Bourdieu's (1991) argument that practice shapes the field, provided more tools for examining Whakatipu's experience. Eco-villagers sought a close relationship with their environment, reflecting societal ideals they felt had declined. Another impetus, environmental crisis due to human activity, also informed a practical critique of the consumerist and capitalist structures within the societal field, and how practice guided by these structures shaped societal and environmental contexts. This critique targeted concerns like pollution, unhealthy eating, environmental degradation, unsustainable consumption, and social and environmental dysfunction due to competition (all discussed in Chapter Four). Other structures, such as permaculture methodology, influenced how residents saw these problems, and how they addressed them (discussed in Chapter Four). As such, residents' intentions reflected the wider intentional community and eco-village emphases on anti-capitalist, ecological revitalisation (Baker, 2013; Wallace, 1956). Most eco-villagers intended their practices to create provision alternative to consumer-capitalism (a term I will soon define), using systems of gardening and building informed by permaculture.

Eco-villagers desired the field – their surrounding environmental and social context – to be changed, through their practice, in a physical way that made further eco-living easier. Environmental change was sought so that their land became their main source of sustenance, and to reflect ideals of a healthy environment. Residents also desired to create a social context where Whakatipu supported the relationships required for individual and co-operative practice. Some then desired to inspire others within local, national and international contexts to pursue eco-lifestyles of their own. In many ways, these changes had begun, as the land had been transformed from what it was before Whakatipu’s establishment, residents hosted visitors to teach, and the eco-village actively influenced the surrounding region’s community.

However, the eco-lifestyles pursued in Whakatipu still existed in a wider context where most practices were conducted in accordance with consumer-capitalism, the orthodox structure that Whakatipu critiqued. Thus, the context they were trying to change was also being shaped by consumer-capitalist practice, meaning success within this field was most feasible for those who continued consumer-capitalist practice. In many ways, survival within that context was only possible through participation in consumer-capitalist activities, such as employment, driving and shopping. This made it difficult for those living in Whakatipu to achieve the change they desired, as eco-villagers lived and acted within a “dominated [reality]” (Hage, 2014, p. 152). Residents lived with the paradox of trying to shape the field in a particular way, while having to continue with actions that supported the status quo.

There were also fringe areas where some residents found alternative practices, while others did not. These individual approaches created conflict in the community, often due to fears that compromise undermined Whakatipu’s societal influence. These tensions were another part of the paradox created by the pursuit of eco-lifestyles, and particular visions of the world, against the flow of consumer-capitalist context.

### **The Consumer-Capitalist Field**

‘Consumer-capitalism’ shaped the field that Whakatipu existed in, and was the subject of eco-villagers’ critique, but simultaneously something they could not completely leave behind. As discussed in Chapter One, critiquing capitalism (or, various conceptions of capitalism) has been the focus of many intentional communities. ‘Capitalism’, broadly defined, is the centuries-old practice of buying and selling for profit. While anarcho-primitivist communities reject these activities,

Whakatipu did not seek this. Rather, the values that Whakatipu revitalised reflected residents' ideas of a time before capitalism created environmental and social degradation to the extent that it is currently believed to be responsible for. Social, political and economic developments within the last century have resulted in consumerist and neoliberal ideologies redefining 'capitalism' in the current era; my use of 'consumer-capitalism' refers to this force. The far-reaching influence over the field that consumer-capitalism has makes participation in it practically unavoidable, and extends capitalism's social and environmental impact beyond what was previously possible.

Neoliberalism dawned with the restructuring of capitalist states, from 1978 onwards, as they removed economic regulation (Harvey, 2005, p. 1). This ideology emphasises the freedom of capital to flow and accumulate, and freedom for individuals to act accordingly. Klein states, "The starting premise is that the free market is a perfect scientific system [...] individuals, acting on their own self-interested desires, create the maximum benefits for all" (2008, p. 51). While reducing economic stagnation as intended, neoliberalism also created skyrocketing inequality around the world (Harvey, 2005, p. 19). Prior to the neoliberalization process starting there in 1984, New Zealand maintained many state-owned enterprises and social welfare programs, central to the nation's egalitarian ideals (Duncan & Bollard, 1992, p. 7; Kelsey, 1993, p. 76). Neoliberalization privatized many such institutions, exposing them to flows of international capital. Through this, and developments such as free-trade agreements, New Zealand engaged with the ongoing globalization of capital flow, a process that holds the rights of businesses to access profits as its foundation (Kelsey, 1993, pp. 113, 117). This foundation means that neoliberalism prioritises short-term profit gains, and thus disregards the long-term sustenance of the natural environment (Harvey, 2005, p. 172). Dawson (2006) describes eco-villages as an activist movement for the neoliberal era; LeVasseur (2013, p. 254) states that the Global Eco-village Network characterized the "neoliberalization of the global commons" as something eco-villages seek to address.

Consumerism originated before neoliberalism, but was exacerbated by it. Dunn states, "Consumer culture consists of a system of meanings, representations and practices that organize consumption as a way of life. Consumerism [...] is an ideology that seductively binds people to this way of life" (2008, p. 8). Teeple

describes how, and why, this ideology now holds great influence over social, political and ecological relationships:

Consumerism is the commodification of socio-cultural needs; it is the penetration of capital into all facets of human need – satisfaction previously fulfilled outside the realm of contract. It is [...] the commodification of everyday life, of culture in the broadest sense. Such subjection to the demands of capital means that all socio-cultural dimensions of life become dominated by corporate interests; the corporation comes to [...] define and structure human needs so that they correspond with society as marketplace. (2000, p. 134)

Neoliberalism expanded consumerism via the “commodification of everything”, the ability to buy and sell practically anything (Harvey, 2005, p. 165). Peoples’ relationships with other people, objects, and experiences are increasingly defined by consumerism, and agency is defined as choice of consumption (Miller, 2007, p. 9); the discourse within VA gap literature, described in Chapter One, illustrates this.

### **Consumer-Capitalism and Whakatipu**

Neoliberalism and consumerism are both context-shaping forces.

Neoliberalism provides the governance framework for this to occur, while through consumerism, everyday practice is continually defined by this form of capitalism (Appadurai, 1997). Society is shaped to accommodate this, because the majority of people rely on commodification to get what they need to survive. Eco-villagers, by-and-large, experienced the era where these forces came to define the societal context they lived within, and the practice of people within that society. While they took clear ethical issue with practices and mindsets that the consumer-capitalist field brought about, they continued to exist in it, and at times acted accordingly *because* of their existence in it. Bell and Ashwood state the shape of the field creates

material constraints that limit what we can do and influence what we are likely to do... These material constraints, in turn, influence what we are likely to think. We’re not sure they limit what we can think – the mind seems boundlessly imaginative – but they sure mightily influence it. (2016, pp. 370-371)

Whakatipu residents did not outline consumer-capitalism as the object of their critique as specifically as I do here. However, as I discuss in Chapter Four, numerous

aspects related to this description of consumer-capitalism greatly concerned residents. One specifically highlighted the dawn of neoliberal policy in 1984 during Labour's 'Rogernomics' era as a key moment of loss for "egalitarian New Zealand". The rejection of purchasing food produced by corporate agriculture through supermarkets pervaded all agricultural practice in the community. Many residents highlighted the growing corporate influence over governments, and expressed wariness over how this could affect their lives in the future – for instance, if Monsanto lobbied for legislature on genetic copyright. The way that capitalist competition spurred further consumption, waste and short-sightedness was also derided. By examining the literature on consumerism and neoliberalism, we can see Whakatipu's critiques address the direction taken by this economic ideology. Overall, residents sought to develop eco-lifestyles that meant they did not have to 'play by those rules' anymore.

The rejection of *these* aspects does not mean residents saw consumer-capitalism completely negatively. Consumer-capitalism has obviously benefited society, including those people who find it unethical. Eco-villagers drew capacity for eco-living from participation in the market, and acknowledged how beneficial this was. Technological development has provided greater potential for sustainability, and mass communication allows for greater exposure to ideas. Recognising these elements, however, does not place consumer-capitalism beyond critique. Marx acknowledged that capitalism created an unprecedented standard of living, but rather than viewing it as a flawed end goal, he considered its potential to enable greater social progress (Barry, 2007, p. 68). While Marx was no environmentalist (Barry, 2007, p. 68), this notion applies to capitalism's relation to ecological living. Eco-villagers are not obligated to accept consumer-capitalism if they acknowledge its benefits. Rather, in a utopian fashion, they attempt to bring about a changed context that provides those benefits, without consumer-capitalism's exploitation and degradation (LeVasseur, 2013; Sargisson, 2007). Haluza-DeLay reinforces this by stating, "As insurgent realities, social movements must critique the dominant reality, articulate a vision of alternatives, and model these alternatives" (2008, p. 215). Some residents did not have problems with aspects of consumer-capitalism, but this did not remove the tension of *having to* maintain activities that supported or required consumer-capitalism.

Even if benefits are acknowledged, remaining involved in consumer-capitalism while attempting to bring about an ecologically ethical alternative remains paradoxical, because capitalism's goals are antithetical to eco-village intentions. Žižek argues that capitalism inherently desires growth, and that this growth, being exponential, will eclipse environmental stability "simply for the reproduction of the system as an end-in-itself" (2011, p. 335). While some herald green capitalism as a way to mitigate environmental damage, the drive for growth will ultimately compromise this approach too. Schweickart (2009) proposes zero-growth capitalism as an answer to this issue, but acknowledges that society generally reacts badly to stagnation, which rules this out. The "drive towards [...] ever-expanding reproduction" described by Žižek (2011, p. 335) is a central element to consumer-capitalism's shaping of the field. This drive is a fundamental problem that any participation in consumer-capitalism effectively supports, which is why developing alternative practice is integral to undermining its detrimental effects. It is also a reason why defining ecological ethics through consumer practices fails to adequately address pro-environmental behaviour, as discussed in Chapter One.

Through their practices, Whakatipu residents limited their support of consumer-capitalism. In doing this, they reduced contribution to unrestrained growth and environmental impact. However, as described, they could not do without some participation in consumer-capitalism, despite attempts over their community's lifespan. Thus, while attempting to change their context so that it was not defined by consumer-capitalism, they had to continue participating in consumer-capitalism. This is the paradox of ecologically ethical practice.

## **Navigating Ethical Practice**

Because of this reality, regardless of how each Whakatipu resident viewed various aspects of consumer-capitalism, there was some practice they continued which they (or another resident) saw as unethical, and ideally would not keep doing. This is precisely the dissonance explored within VA gap literature. There are, however, differences to what that discourse presents: Whakatipu's experience illustrated valid practice taking place outside of a consumerism context, and a persisting gap between ethics and practice that cannot just be described as individual flaws in consumption habits. Had eco-villagers failed ethically if they remained engaged in unethical practices because there were no suitable alternatives available?



Was it their fault that they continued supporting the consumer-capitalist context they were trying to change, because they needed to survive within that context?

Here, Bourdieu's habitus concept re-emerges. As described in Chapter One, understanding habitus as strategies for navigating practice demonstrates that ethical living should be considered as a process in relation to context, rather than sought in specific instances of failure or success. Practice is limited by what is actually possible within the field, and as such, the ability to always match lifestyle with ethics lies beyond individuals' control to some extent. People who desire to pursue ethical practice and change their context, such as those in Whakatipu, also have to compromise with their ethics until they are presented with the possibility to progress with eco-lifestyle development. Thus, they exist in a space that Singh terms "unresolved, nondialectical<sup>14</sup> tension" (2014, p. 167). This is the paradox of needing to be "unsustainable to be sustainable" (Smith, 2002, p. 45), and the tension here, particularly because of feelings of inconsistency, contributes to internal dissonance and interpersonal conflict. However, habitus formed through pursuing ethical practice allows people to make strategic choices in instances where further ethical choices may be available, and attempt to navigate towards these moments. This helps to mitigate the tension of living in a paradox that requires unethical practice for ethical living. "Sustaining" this habitus is what Smith terms to be the best way to understand a "moral", or ethical, identity, rather than succeeding at achieving every value in practice (2001, p. 202). As individuals all have varying dispositions, capacities, experiences and perceptions of the field, this occurs differently for every individual, which results in numerous, different approaches to practice.

As illustrated in Chapter One, both Smith (2001) and Haluza-DeLay (2008) highlight the connection between habitus and field to show why habitus works well for considering ecological ethics. This means considering oneself as integrated into physical and social environments, but also what effects environment may have on practice (Haluza-DeLay & Berezan, 2013, p. 140). Smith (2001) notes that the societal context is influenced by forces, such as consumer-capitalism, that work against the re-characterisation of one's relationship to nature; they influence habitus also. However if people attempt to intentionally discern and reduce the way

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<sup>14</sup> Singh (2014) develops non-dialectics from the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, who describe how, rather than resolving conflict through synthesising opposing perspectives as proposed by dialectics, binary relationships can produce unresolving poles of existence (1987, p. 388).



consumer-capitalism characterises their relationships with both environmental and societal contexts, new relationships with both contexts can develop. Along with the knowledge of what constitutes ecological practice and how to start undertaking it, Haluza-DeLay proposes the central requirement for an eco-habitus is reflexivity, particularly in recognising “how social relations resist an ecological worldview and lifestyle” (2008, p. 214). This reflexivity renders some of habitus’ strategies visible, bringing them from the “pre-logical” to being actively applied (Haluza-DeLay, 2008, p. 214). Whakatipu residents possessed such reflexivity, and discussed some strategies they developed while living in their field and attempting to shape it.

Whakatipu residents had developed a closer, integrated relationship with their immediate natural environment, where they acted with the interdependence of themselves and environment in mind. However, they also understood that their eco-village, and local environment, existed within a wider societal context defined by consumer-capitalism. The limitations presented by this consumer-capitalist context led eco-villagers to develop pragmatic and holistic decision-making strategies to help them pursue eco-lifestyles. Pragmatism was described as a realisation that complete sustainability would not be possible for the community, and that putting ecological ethics into practice was not ‘black and white’; this entailed accepting compromise. Other studies state that eco-villages develop similar ideas when members discover they cannot completely achieve ideals (Hong & Vicdan, 2016; Kaspar, 2008). Holism was an approach where facets of sustainable living beyond environmental impact were considered; pursuing new practices meant considering social, economic and spiritual factors, and maintaining balance between them. This bears similarity to the wider emphasis on holism in eco-village development, as described in Chapter One. Holism functioned alongside pragmatism, as some ecological practices had to be foregone if they strained these other areas. Residents discussed how these strategies, which are explored further in Chapter 6, allowed them to pursue their ideal lifestyles over time, and across changes in capacity. By considering potential courses of action in this way, residents could continue to develop their eco-lifestyles and pursue change within their environmental and societal contexts, despite the challenges posed by these contexts, because they acknowledged the limitations there. The resulting practices did not always match ultimate ethical ideals, but could be closer to the ideal. For Whakatipu residents, ethical success did not emerge in completely achieving

ideals, but rather maintaining a continual direction toward desired lifestyles, and progressively changing the environmental and societal contexts they lived within.

## **Conclusion**

Applying Bourdieu's theory of practice helped me understand how Whakatipu's residents created ecologically ethical practice, despite not achieving independence from activities they viewed unfavourably. Rather than simply having 'succeeded', they progressed toward their ethical ideal against numerous challenges.

Exploring disposition and capacity shows why, and how, eco-villagers pursued eco-lifestyles, and demonstrated how context created the potential for this practice to occur. Examining the societal context that surrounds Whakatipu as a field, which has a consumer-capitalist orthodoxy structuring the practice there, helps explain what changes eco-villagers were motivated to create, and why they were limited in doing so. Understanding these factors helps make sense of some of the conflict in Whakatipu. Ultimately, wider society affected what actions residents could achieve enormously. However, observing the habitus brought about by experiences of attempting alternative practice shows how these challenges were addressed, and more ideals realised, as new cases of the possible appeared. Eco-villagers came to acknowledge the relationships they had with various contexts in new ways; while building closer connection with, and understanding of, their local environment, they also understood that this existed within a wider societal context that still required things of them. The pragmatic and holistic strategies that subsequently emerged in Whakatipu allowed eco-villagers to live with their paradox of 'unsustainable to be sustainable' practice, as they knew their pursuit was a never-ending journey. Whakatipu shows that while ethical ideals may not currently be completely possible, they are still *pursuable*.

In the next chapter, I present discussion from eco-villagers about what brought them to Whakatipu, and what had enabled them to live there, in order to understand what promotes ecological living.

## 4 Why Live an Ecological Life?

For eco-villagers, moving to Whakatipu to pursue ecological living was a definitive lifestyle choice, something that they had largely committed to for the rest of their lives. Why they had done so, and what had allowed them to do it, were central points to address for my aim of exploring what might encourage and enable more people to live ecologically. In this chapter I discuss the experiences and perspectives that Whakatipu's residents had which motivated them to pursue eco-lifestyles there, and the financial resources that enabled them to do so. I also explore how many eco-villagers regarded the design philosophy of permaculture as an influence that had empowered them to pursue the lifestyles they wanted.

I deploy Bourdieu's concepts of disposition and capacity here, as the two central influences on what kind of practice was desired, but also what was possible for an individual to undertake. Disposition, described by Bourdieu (1977, p. 15) as "inculcated" and "cultivated" for an individual throughout their life, is particularly relevant here, as residents described the experiences which led them to reject aspects of consumer-capitalism. Similarly, capacity to achieve something is what allows dispositions to start being met. In Whakatipu's case, however, there was a tension between these two attributes, as the financial capacity that enabled eco-villagers to settle in Whakatipu was derived from the same capitalist practice that many of them critiqued. Differing perspectives on the implications of this, in part, led to individual variations developing in ethics, desired change, and subsequently lifestyle. The adoption of permaculture, too, was an area where an initially communal approach split into numerous individual interpretations, based on what people found applicable in their own unique situations. However, permaculture remained a key influence that showed residents their lifestyles, land, and society could be changed.

### Where Ethical Ideals Came From

To understand why eco-villagers undertook such a concerted pursuit of eco-lifestyles, I wanted to know where their ethical ideals came from, and why they were motivated to achieve these. Several key themes arose through my discussion with residents: they had important ecological influences early in life, moments of exposure to ethical concerns later in life, and were discontent with the direction of wider society in terms of lifestyles influenced by consumer-capitalism, which they wanted

to act against. Other key perspectives also began to emerge on eco-villagers' relationships to their wider societal and environmental contexts, how they wanted to change these contexts, and where their individual positions differed.

### **Influences Throughout Life**

Many eco-villagers pinpointed their desires for eco-lifestyle arising from formative early-life experiences. Some described their environmental inclinations as innate, or simply 'there':

*Katherine:* I think we've always had really a strong environmental conviction.

*John:* We've always been environmentalists.

*Katherine:* We've been serious greenies.

Such comments led to discussion of early-life influences that moulded such dispositions. My questions on this topic sparked conversation among eco-villagers outside interviews:

*Kurt:* We had an interesting conversation with Erich and Philippa about this yesterday. Because the next question is, 'Okay, so where do we have that from, that we don't want to waste? Did we invent that, or did we come to that?' Our suspicion, at least, is that it came from our parents.

Kurt and his partner Ella saw their parents' influence, particularly a post-War frugality mindset, throughout their childhoods. Other discussions followed similar familial themes; some residents mentioned growing up on farms, and how this introduced them to ecological and self-sufficiency ideals:

*Beth:* I was brought up on a farm, with a strong work ethic, and common sense principles.<sup>15</sup>

*Gerrald:* In Germany, I grew up totally in the countryside. My grandfather worked his whole life, more than fifty years, on a huge farm – 1,300 hectares. He was the bricklayer, carpenter, all these things, built all the buildings. So I grew up there, it was a part of my life. My parents had a big garden, my grandfather's garden was like a football field.

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<sup>15</sup> Members often described eco-lifestyles as 'common sense,' seeing them as logical when considering human/environment relationships.

Other residents referred to family practices of gardening and composting, and parents who sparked an awareness of health and organics:

*Frank:* We had always had been into composting, and Uncle Ralph with his horse manure with his potatoes, and fish guts...<sup>16</sup>

*Katherine:* It probably came from my father, a very unusual, outspoken character. He was fighting against 245T before anyone knew that it was bad. I was brought up by a mother who, although she did use some chemicals in her fruit trees, was always making compost, and always gardening. So, I guess it's my upbringing, which has pushed me towards the land, and permaculture.

*Maria:* My dad always had a garden, and said, "What you're putting into the garden is going into your food. So, make sure that you put in good stuff."

An eco-lifestyle appeared to many eco-villagers as a 'natural' desire. Discussion about family members who were active gardeners also brought eco-villagers to reflect on wider societal emphases throughout the era they grew up in. Gardening, and providing for oneself, was not only a formative experience, but also something they thought was previously more common in everyday life; I expand upon this soon.

Many in Whakatipu also grew up in the 1960s/70s, when the earlier environmental movement and wave of intentional communities that came with it were influential in New Zealand society:

*Diane:* I'd grown up with a general awareness of the earth, the environment, and ecology, studied ecology and biology, taught biology, and had a real inner value about trying to minimize your ecological footprint.

*Alex:* I grew up in the 70's, and the alternative thing was to live simply. It was before sustainability and going green, all the buzzwords, but it was about living simply, being part of nature, and living more of what you might call a natural life.

Alex had spent time in James K. Baxter's Jerusalem commune, a location featured in Jones' *A Hard-Won Freedom* (1975). Some residents' motivation for eco-village living originated from exposure to this earlier movement, illustrating heritage that

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<sup>16</sup> "Fish guts" relates to the practice of spreading them over the garden as fertilizer, a method associated with biodynamics.

eco-villages have in previous intentional communities (Dawson, 2006; 2013; Lockyer & Veteto, 2013). It also demonstrates the societal impact that these communities, and the wider movement, had at the time.

Some residents pointed at events during their adolescence and early adulthood that shaped their environmental consciousness. These experiences formed lasting impressions that influenced future decisions:

*Joe:* [An Outward Bound guide] educated me, in pretty strong language – “Until some really caring bastard turns up, and picks up your bit of cellophane, it’ll be lying on the effing ground for the next 2000, 3000 years!” I tell you from that day, I go fishing off the rocks, I pick up everyone else’s plastic, I put it in a bag, I bring home the bag with me.

*Leon:* Once I started travelling... the difference between what I experienced millions of people living, and the way we lived in Switzerland, was just horrific. I remember coming back, and I felt like a bloody alien. Walking around in Zurich Bahnhofstrasse, where all the world’s banks have their headquarters, I felt like a zombie – ‘What am I doing here?’ I’ve seen people literally starving to death in front of me, and not been able to do anything about it. That shaped the rest of my life very much.

*Harry:* I sat at the feet of Jeremy Leggett, the climate campaigner, and I realised that climate change was the issue of my lifetime. I’d followed it for years before, I’ve got a science training. Through my teenage years, I’d been reading about carbon dioxide ratcheting upwards ... I absolutely believed that carbon dioxide could warm the planet.

While some events appeared as ‘moments of clarity’, they played a similar role to influences from earlier life, as they informed paradigms for how residents saw their relationship with the environment, and other people. While early-life influences had greater influence over what life was desirable, these moments often highlighted for eco-villagers what life, or what type of society, was *not* desirable. They also show where some found their individual ideas of a *correct* ethical lifestyle. Leon talked about developing awareness of poverty, which led him to emphasise social justice. Similarly, Joe mentioned learning about waste’s repercussions, and then described his desire to reduce waste around him. As with early life experiences, these events

informed what type of lives eco-villagers desired; while they all ended up at Whakatipu, there was variation. Not all variation in beliefs and practices can be traced to these influences, but they demonstrate one way lifestyle differences emerged.

### **Responding to Societal Shifts**

When discussing why they desired eco-lifestyles, residents showed concern about problems in wider society. Some of these concerns are evident in the previous responses from Joe, Leon and Harry, but further comments highlighted concerns about environmental degradation, social inequality, and widespread subscription to a consumer-capitalist lifestyle. These concerns established a critique of consumer-capitalist practices, and the influence these had on society, the environment, and over eco-villagers themselves, as a central purpose of Whakatipu.

Values such as self-sufficiency, closeness to nature, and egalitarianism were referred to within the life influences described earlier; statements followed about how these values had declined within their wider society:

*Katherine* [on a do-it-yourself lifestyle]: I think it's something that New Zealanders are losing. That's always been really strong in New Zealand, people just sort things out themselves. We've always had that very strong belief in [ourselves], I think.

*Harry*: I'm 65 years old, I grew up in the most extraordinarily prosperous and egalitarian society. The world may never again see that level of security and safety. I was surrounded by good people where I lived. I didn't know what social problems were. I had patches in my pants – but that's not what bothers a kid. There were kids to play with, and mud to throw, and world-class education.

*Frank* [talking about exploring sustainable living]: Certainly, this is the track, and the more of us, like you, who are doing it on a professional level, the more chance that we might get back to our egalitarian New Zealand.

Residents connected egalitarianism and self-sufficiency with eco-lifestyles, and believed these values had been adhered to more in the past. Whakatipu, like other eco-villages, saw social values like egalitarianism as necessary for lifestyles that had a 'correct' environmental relationship (Dawson, 2013, p. 221; Litfin, 2014). A

communal lifestyle pursuit also requires extensive emphasis on social relationships if it is to last. Egalitarianism and environmentalism are both values that feature strongly in New Zealand's history; eco-villagers' focus on them indicates a revitalisation for the specific New Zealand context (Sargisson and Sargent, 2004).

Eco-villagers criticised specific practices that concerned them, which they felt had led to earlier values declining – corporate business practices, for example:

*Frank:* Spin, from the powers that be. Drug companies that say, “Oh, vaccinations are essential, and you need these drugs.” Petrol companies that want to hang on to their fossil fuels, rather than putting money into solar electric.

*Rose:* The government is all about sustaining corporate things.

*Erich:* When I look at the wealth distribution in society, that worries me. Wealth gets concentrated in fewer and fewer hands, and more people end up at the bottom of the heap.

*Philippa:* It's like the work of the last hundred years is about to be undone, we're going to back to a feudal system again. It's just a few lords, the corporate heads, and that's it.

Similarly, residents viewed consumerism and competition critically for social and environmental reasons:

*Maria:* You get caught up in the hype when you're in the city – “I've got to have that, if I don't have that, I'm not...” When you're younger, I think you are persuaded more, peer pressure, that kind of thing.

*Erich:* I don't know how many thousands of years, and how many generations, the predominant paradigm has been competition. For me, that's an out-dated paradigm, we need to get away from that, otherwise we'll wreck the planet if we keep competing for resources, for everything.

Some also discussed wastefulness resulting from desire for convenience:

*Alex:* It's easier to flush the toilet than empty it yourself. I think that in our society, or in New Zealand, it's more common... The idea of taking care of your own shit, in a composting sense, is well and truly gone.



*Kurt:* In the world, in the way we live, and particularly in the West, we are wasting too much.

Eco-villagers saw these mindsets and practices defining life within mainstream society, and therefore how humans interacted with one another and the environment. Some of these problems are age-old; Erich stated that ‘competition’ has been around for thousands of years. However, as mentioned in Chapter Three, and illustrated within some of this discussion, eco-villagers saw the influence of consumer-capitalism increasing in society, and thus environmental and social relations worsening. ‘Rogernomics’ and ‘1984’, key terms for New Zealand’s neoliberalisation process, were mentioned at other points, and many residents were concerned about influence from corporations like Monsanto, and free trade agreements such as the TPPA.<sup>17</sup>

Residents described how this reality is incentivised and reinforced:

*John:* I remember when I was at school, the whole thing about your career path, what you’re going to do when you grow up... That stays with a lot of people, I think people are afraid to pull out of that. People buy into it hook, line, and sinker, and trap themselves.

*Katherine:* I’d say there’s a huge pressure from society to live the conventional way. It’s all really laid out for them, the path is so well treaded.

They also argued “the conventional way” entailed a struggle to survive within it, which restricted people from considering alternatives:

*Leon:* Lack of money, lack of information, of awareness, ignorance, education... But yeah, in a western society, lack of money is definitely the thing.

*Beth:* A lot of people are just busy trying to make ends meet themselves. You know, mortgages... It’s so expensive.

*Erich:* I think that the unsustainable system, overall, has got hold of people to an extent where they’re so busy keeping their heads above water, there isn’t

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<sup>17</sup> The Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) was a free trade agreement incorporating twelve Pacific nations, including New Zealand (*Trans-Pacific Partnership overview*, 2015). It attracted large protests within many of those nations, including New Zealand, largely due to its secretive negotiations, and was still a point of concern at the time of my research.

any spare time or energy to step back from what you're doing and think about it.

Creating lifestyles that were not influenced by consumer-capitalism was therefore one key reason to live in Whakatipu. The change desired here was to no longer have to 'play by those rules', or continue on the 'well-treaded path' that Katherine describes. This change took place in the practices of individual residents, and through challenging their own mentalities which leaned toward mainstream living.

Overall, these societal critiques are similar to, and continue from, the motivations of earlier intentional communities that pursued anti-capitalist lifestyles (Jones, 1975; Jones, 2011). I did not know this before arriving in Whakatipu, and was therefore surprised that some residents' motivation for eco-lifestyle existed before current climate-change focused environmentalism. I encountered this one morning as I read an email petition, detailing Antarctic ice loss, with Katherine. She lamented economic growth being prioritised over environmental concerns. I asked her and John, "Was awareness of an environmental crisis originally influential on you pursuing sustainability?" They responded that while they knew about problems like the ozone hole when moving to Whakatipu, they did not feel the impetus to act in response to global environmental degradation like they subsequently developed. I had thought eco-villages were responding to the current crisis; eco-village literature discusses this perspective (Litfin, 2014). However, this demonstrates Whakatipu's connection with the intentional community tradition in New Zealand, which was foremost an anti-capitalist, agricultural, communal revitalisation movement (Jenkin, 2011; 2012; Jones, 1975; Jones, 2011). While Whakatipu residents often criticised elements of this movement, the continuation of its revitalisation is still apparent in Whakatipu's lifestyle. Knowledge about contemporary environmental problems and desire to change these, however, had become a central focus for many in Whakatipu.

It is key to note that residents' concerns about consumer-capitalism varied. All pursued lifestyles alternative to the mainstream, but some had particular emphases that they addressed through practice. Some prioritised recycling, because they felt waste was the biggest problem. Others prioritised self-sufficiency, as they felt that mainstream centralised food provision and electricity infrastructure were unnecessary and destructive. There was also variation on the scale of what they addressed, as some felt there were problems with most aspects of modern urban living, while others

valued cities for the opportunities they presented, and the population they catered to.<sup>18</sup> I explore similar variations further in Chapter Five. However, it is important to note that some residents had a particular motivation to practice ‘by example’, so that others outside Whakatipu could learn from them. This indicates that these eco-villagers saw mainstream society as a site of change, as they believed the lifestyle they pursued was a more positive way to live, and that promoting it would halt wider environmental and social degradation (as the activities of mainstream society affect everyone).

### **Creating Societal Change**

Eco-villagers who desired wider influence sought to expose their practice to people outside the community, through educational courses and open days, and taking on visitors such as WWOOFers, which are common undertakings for eco-villages (Kaspar, 2008; Litfin, 2014):

*Philippa:* We wanted to provide education. We have done that, and still are, in many different ways. Lots of us are continuously involved in education, in terms of courses, whether it’s horticulture, permaculture, teaching how to make this, that or the other, in a more ecological way. There are WWOOFers, interns that come and learn, students.

*Ella:* I really like what Katherine and John are doing, having young people there, and showing them different ways. We used to have permaculture courses, and you know, with my teaching – even if it’s only a little bit, you know? I think sometimes people take something on.

*Frank:* Just do the best to teach by example, I suppose. Everybody’s working on an individual level, and trying not to go insane with frustration. At the moment, I’m afraid we’re on a bit of a low ebb. People like Erich and Philippa have got things worked out, they can have visitors to come... But it used to be, with our open days, and permaculture courses, that we had a big effect, a big influence.

Exposure had, as Frank mentioned, been more prevalent in the past, although newer eco-villagers were starting to see potential for renewed societal engagement:

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<sup>18</sup> The argument was if all people in cities were to move to rural areas, those areas would be destroyed. Therefore high-density living could be good for the planet if it was conducted in a more ecologically conscious way.

*David:* If there's an incorporated society here, there's a wider membership that could be allowed, so people can feel some sense of inclusion, even though they might come and visit once a year, or come and do a course, or come and do WWOOFing, or whatever, because it just means... "Maybe I can't live there, for whatever reason,, but I can go and help out, or I can go and learn how to do something, or go and experience the environment."

These residents intended to inspire, rather than convert, other people; however, thoughts on whether people outside Whakatipu *ought* to explore eco-living varied. Eco-villagers generally said they did not believe in pushing ideals on anybody. However, at the same time, some considered those living predominantly under consumer-capitalism as contributing (not necessarily consciously) to the environmental crisis. Across other eco-village sites, there is a tension around scale of influence, and whether members "are working toward creating autonomous ecovillages, or incorporating their vision into a larger network across a geographical region" (LeVasseur, 2013, p. 265). This remains a point for consideration in whether eco-villages are social change movements, and what level of change they seek. While many eco-villages state that creating societal change through education is part of their purpose, this may not be the focus of all members, as Whakatipu illustrated. The costs of undertaking an eco-village lifestyle also play into this, as I explore next.

## **Capacity**

Numerous factors enabled members to establish Whakatipu, and to continue living there. While physical fitness was occasionally mentioned (largely because some members were struggling with this as they aged), members were quick to discuss the financial equity that allowed them to settle in Whakatipu. I had not initially considered this, but I underestimated the cost of establishing an eco-village. One resident described Whakatipu's demographic:

They're not poor, no one's poor here. Some people are retired and on a limited income, but they own their own land, so...

Sargisson and Sargent state, "[Eco-villages] are often founded by people in their late 30s or 40s who have had a successful professional or working life and now seek a life more meaningful" (2004, p. 131). They do not state financial means are *required*, although other authors note communities are currently hard to establish due to land

prices (Dawson, 2013, p. 227). For those in Whakatipu, having money was essential. This marks a difference between eco-villages and earlier intentional communities, as commune members in the 1960s/70s often did not have much money (Jones, 2011). Requiring money also creates tension, because it means that eco-villagers have benefited (and need to continue benefiting from) aspects of capitalism.

Moving to Whakatipu required people to buy their own land, and pay extra for the community's development costs:

*John:* It might have been fifty-eight thousand for the land, and twenty-two thousand in shares, for the development of the land.

Building in compliance with the agreements attached to the land title – without chemically treated timber, for instance – cost substantially more than a normal house.<sup>19</sup> Further funds were needed to support living, sometimes with young families, while undertaking the project. For many members, this meant juggling employment with developing properties:

*David:* It's that balance between earning money, because there's things that you need to do that do cost money, and then having the time to do what you want to do here, all without having to pay other people to do it.

*Diane:* I need to keep working while we actually set up a simple life, because it actually costs quite a lot to set up a simple life, comfortably! (laughs).

*Alex:* It's very expensive to live inexpensively.

This process was drawn out for many. Erich and Philippa, for instance, did not complete their house until around four years after moving to Whakatipu. Previously, they lived in a furnished section of their barn. Some could not complete the project:

*Katherine:* We saw other people coming here and struggling, not having the means to really sort themselves out.

*John:* There were already three families that had failed.

Due to these costs and challenges, members had to have money and investments in order to successfully establish their properties:

*Harry* [After being asked if there were any difficulties in starting the transition]: It was dead easy. The technical issues were a breeze. I'm practical,

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<sup>19</sup> In numerous instances, recycled materials were used, although what recycled materials were allowed (such as recycled treated timber, or recycled aluminum) had been contested.

and had plenty of energy, all those years ago. We were never stuck for money, for projects.

*John* [talking about how a property market boom provided a large profit]: It was like the sun shone on us when that happened. That paid all our mortgages, so we had the four rental properties, and this place, mortgage free. That was a pretty cunning move that we did. From that point on, we built everything here, and did all this development, just on money that was coming in.

*Joe* [who sold a business and renovated properties to pursue a self-sufficient lifestyle]: We go out and work, we've never worked so hard. We're working hard, but we're working to live, as opposed to living to work, like we were in Auckland. \$300,000 mortgage man, she's a bad buzz. You can't stop. We don't have a mortgage, we don't have to chase around, living for the dollar.

Many such investments also helped life in Whakatipu continue. Some residents still held jobs, which provided funds to continue developing their eco-lifestyle. As noted in Chapter Three, continued participation in consumer-capitalism was not always seen negatively:

*John*: You can use the system to get what you want, by working for it.

However, continued reliance on outside employment, and associated consumption from travel to and from work, was usually not ideal either:

*Logan*: So, at the moment, we both work, and that takes up most of our time...

*Rose*: He has to drive to work everyday, which before we didn't.

*Logan*: I would like that to change as well. But we have to pay the rent. So you're stuck with all these things, because you have to do this, and that, and... so, we're sort of... we're looking to change things eventually, you know?

Regardless, financial security had to be maintained. Residents therefore came to recognise the need for economic sustainability as well as environmental sustainability.

The need for mainstream economic support, and the tension this creates for people rejecting capitalism, is well documented in other research. Members of Webb's communities had "always been dependent on external sources of income for their financial survival", including the unemployment benefit (1999, p. 37). Members of other communities argue that continued reliance on mainstream sources removes

the drive for properly developing a localised sharing economy, because people are too comfortable to truly attempt alternative economies (Hong & Vicdan, 2016, p. 134). However, this kind of capacity appears necessary to actually establish eco-villages. Ultimately, reliance on mainstream economic capital to pursue eco-lifestyles must be recognised, as Baker says, as resulting from the societal context that ecovillages exist within, which is characterised by a “culture of capitalism” (2013, p. 287).

### **Economic Privilege and Societal Change**

Members were often conscious of the finances that had allowed them to settle; some saw themselves as privileged, and that their financial ability to pursue their desired lifestyle was the result of socio-economic status:

*Alex:* To live this life, I think, is quite an expensive choice. I think that we’re very privileged to live like this, I’m really happy that we can. The financial stability to do it is probably one of the things that I didn’t have earlier in my life, to make it possible.

Not all in the community had the same financial means, as some residents rented in the eco-village. Therefore, there was contrast in ability to pursue eco-lifestyles within Whakatipu itself. Renters undertook some eco-practice, such as growing food and composting. While they spoke positively of the community, there were differences in what they could do, because they needed more income to live there.

Alex believed that Whakatipu’s lifestyle could not be undertaken by everyone; similar discussion from other residents illustrated that this posed difficulties for the social change that some wanted to inspire:

*Beth:* I think there’s those people who... Very high unemployment rate. We’ve got people who really don’t feel they’ve got those choices to care for the environment.

*Leon:* Even though they’re much more in-tune with Mother Earth and the environment, poor people don’t have the luxury of doing things environmentally friendly. If they’ve got no other way to cook food, they have to chop down the last tree, which happens all over the world. Whereas, with us, we’re very, very privileged... I’m not rich, but compared to probably two thirds of the world, I’m wealthy. Compared to at least half the world’s population, I live like a king.

Discussions of privilege did not preclude there was *no* potential for ethical practice for the less well-off, although they might be challenged to develop lifestyles like those in Whakatipu.

However, other residents questioned whether Whakatipu should seek to influence others toward specific practice at all:

[Responding to whether more people should pursue a more sustainable lifestyle]: In terms of the population, we can't have four million people, in New Zealand, living on a 2 hectare block. It's just not feasible, it's not possible... So, does everybody need to... My question is can everybody, and I would say no.

I think it's hugely arrogant for people to live somewhere like this, and patronising, actually, to say we're somehow showing the rest of the world how to live. I would never buy into that.

Eco-villagers with these views still desired change, but mostly within their own lives. They did not connect their ideal lifestyles with wider change in the world. Partially, this was because they did not think it correct to view how everyone else lived as unethical, or expect those with less financial ability to pursue a lifestyle beyond reach. For them, this was *their* correct lifestyle choice.

This created a major variation in intention, and practice, for the ethics of the community as a whole. While acknowledging they wanted a life that had reduced influence from consumer-capitalism, these residents did not necessarily see mainstream society as totally problematic. After all, it had supported their eco-lifestyle pursuit. Their move to Whakatipu, however, demonstrated there were elements they desired to be separate from. Other eco-village studies feature community members who are aware their lifestyle is exclusive to those from a middle- or upper-class background (Hong & Vicdan, 2016, pp. 131-132).

## **Permaculture**

Permaculture design strongly influenced the knowledge and abilities of many Whakatipu residents, and provided them with established practices to adapt in their lifestyle development. It showed a practical path for eco-villagers to start pursuing their ideals, and a vision of what an alternative lifestyle (and world) might look like.



Residents did not completely adhere to permaculture as a method for their practice, but rather adapted many of its recommendations to suit their individual needs. Here, I outline permaculture and how eco-villagers interacted with it as a guide for their eco-lifestyles. In Chapter Five, I then explore how this translated into the multitude of practices in Whakatipu.

Mollison and Holmgren created permaculture in the 1970s as an alternative agricultural method, popularising it through their guide book *Permaculture One* (1981, first printing in 1978). They define permaculture broadly:

Permaculture is [...] an integrated, evolving system of perennial or self-perpetuating plant and animal species useful to man. It is [...] a complete agricultural ecosystem, modelled on existing but simpler examples [...] We jointly evolved the system [...] as an attempt to improve extant agricultural practices, both those of Western agribusiness, and the peasant grain culture of the third world. The former system is energy expensive, mechanistic, and destructive of soil structure and quality [...] Perhaps we seek the Garden of Eden, and why not? We believe that a low-energy, high-yielding agriculture is a possible aim for the whole world, and that it needs only human energy and intellect to achieve this. (1981, p. 1)

Permaculture provides in-depth methods for attempting to create self-sufficient, sustainable systems throughout a life-long investment (Mollison & Holmgren, 1981, p. 29). The results, evidenced in Whakatipu's building and landscape design, are impressive. Walking into residents' homes for the first time was usually breathtaking. John and Katherine's home – constructed from earthen brick walls and untreated timber, with a raised wooden bridge running through their living room – was particularly awe-inspiring. Permaculture utilises pre-existing geological and biological features of the land; low points and waterways are developed into reservoirs and waste-treatment systems, while high ground is used to shelter buildings and gardens. Design acknowledges annual cycles, particularly solar, as gardens and buildings harness solar energy to produce growth and heat. 'Zones' for animals and planting create nutrient flow within biological systems where species support one another. *Permaculture One* details all of this. Holmgren later expanded permaculture beyond agriculture into a holistic design methodology, emphasizing longevity. Holmgren (2002, p. xix) states that, "A more current definition of permaculture [...]"

is ‘Consciously designed landscapes which mimic the patterns and relationships found in nature, while yielding an abundance of food, fibre and energy for provision of local needs.’ This appears to be a response to declining global resources, and insufficient societal consideration of the long-term survival of earth or humanity.

Permaculture has become an integral part of the eco-village movement (Litfin, 2014). It incorporates an explicit societal critique, particularly toward industrial agriculture, design and consumption, as the prefix ‘perma-’ denotes permanent and sustainable interaction with the environment. It also has an implicit political



*Figure 2.* John and Katherine's home. The central pole was a recycled hardwood telephone pole, and the floor was a recycled tile mosaic. John had constructed the laminated beams for this bridge himself.

undercurrent, incorporating utopian philosophies familiar to intentional community tradition, indicated with the mention of “Garden of Eden” (Mollison & Holmgren, 1981, p. 1). For communities critiquing capitalist society through practice, the appeal is obvious. Change is created in a physical, practical way through intentionally constructing living environments, which alters how community members relate to these environments. Other researchers argue that permaculture’s emphasis on holistic living requires practitioners to develop holistic, egalitarian approaches in their social relationships, meaning permaculture structures both environmental and social aspects of eco-lifestyles (Fox, 2013, p. 174). Philippa echoed this aspect when discussing permaculture’s appeal:

It is a coming together, it is not compartmentalised. It is actually the first time having a holistic approach, the whole of life and what it means, under one kind of philosophy.

### **Discovering Permaculture**

Building on earlier influences for ecological living, discovering permaculture pushed many eco-villagers to attempt an eco-lifestyle, and provided tools to do so:

*Philippa:* We were interested in things eco, and the biggest thing was when I did my permaculture course in ’93. When I came back from that, Erich and I had a clearer direction of how we could get where we wanted to get.

*Beth:* I got a permaculture video from the library. This must have been in the mid-eighties. I was absolutely inspired with this. I got a bit involved – not as much as I could have, because I went back working, teaching fulltime, and I was busy with different things. But permaculture ethics really rang true.

*Joe:* I was very clever, or lucky, to suggest that if [his property’s previous owner] had any books that he’d read, and didn’t think he’d read again, could he leave them here... He left me his library, everything you want to know about permaculture – indexed of course, being German.

Joe later mentioned spending whole nights reading the books, to understand the design of his property, and how to continue developing it. Others joined Whakatipu specifically because of its intention to practice permaculture. In almost all instances, however, permaculture appealed because of previously-held desires for eco-lifestyles.

## **Incorporating Permaculture**

Whakatipu was specifically established to practice permaculture, in design and subsequent activities like gardening. Most residents did not believe permaculture should dictate practice, even if some implied previously leaning toward that. Rather, it provided guidelines for possible actions:

*Philippa:* I think permaculture is a design methodology and a philosophy. That's what got us, that was so convincing, it's not a doctrine. It's operating from ethics and principles. You look around here, how different every house is, yeah? You can interpret it in so many ways, as long as you follow those ethics and principles – brilliant! It never felt as a straight jacket, or anything, it gives us room to move and be ourselves, and at the same time know that we are doing something better, and looking – always looking downstream, so to speak... What is the effect of what we are doing here?

Philippa indicated that while permaculture provided thorough instructions, it could be flexibly applied in individual situations. John and Katherine had a similar perspective, although had differing views between themselves on whether the extensive instruction was necessary, as indicated in this discussion:

*John:* It's different for every different environment. I think here, for what we're doing, permaculture's absolutely perfect. It's very easy, because things grow here. We have an edible landscape.

*Katherine:* But it is just common sense though. Where to orientate your house, where to put your vege garden, where to put your herbs, your fruit trees, your forestry block, where to position your house on a slope...

*John:* But it's also the concept of making yourself part of that environment...

*Katherine:* Yeah, but if you think about it, it is just common sense.

*John:* We are a part of it. We are an organism that's controlling this particular little ecosystem. But we are trying to create an ecosystem that is self-containing.

While Katherine's perspective of permaculture as 'common sense' resonated with the idea that it complemented the activities people were already undertaking, John espoused how systemic methods were useful for tackling complex scenarios. These approaches functioned together, and illustrate how most eco-villagers applied permaculture.

While permaculture defined the community at its formation, newer residents were still coming to terms with it:

*David:* Neither of us is particularly knowledgeable about permaculture. We've done some courses, and a lot of reading. But we're not doing anything with a particularly ideology. We have a basic plan, ideas about how we want the property to be laid out, and what we want to have here. But I wouldn't say it's 100% from a permaculture bible or anything... An advantage here is there are a lot of people around who have a lot of knowledge. So you can actually just learn a lot from your neighbours. That was probably part of the appeal, I guess.

David showed he was developing an attitude toward permaculture similar to that of long-time residents, where he saw it providing flexible guidance.

Others were wary about permaculture dominating their lifestyles, particularly if individual tastes and circumstances were not catered to by its recommendations. While Philippa talked about freedom of choice, she still included the caveat "as long as you follow those ethics and principles", a condition some questioned:

*Gerrald:* I was never a fanatic person. So, I never would 'do' something because it must be in this permaculture way. The gurus who wrote, 'It must be so' – no, that was never my life, but where it works for us well...

*Leon:* To me, the rules were guidelines, not... We had ridiculous rules at the beginning, like building sites have to be kept clean and tidy at all times! (laughs) Colours of buildings have to be earth colours, except for trim – I announced at a meeting, "My building is going to be all trim."

Eco-villagers who felt this way still engaged with permaculture, but emphasised that they were not bound to it. Partially, this was due to conflict with other residents who had lobbied for a strict community application of permaculture in the past. Some residents, however, did not feel permaculture supported their lifestyles:

It's hard to do something that's sustainable, with old stuff. In terms of fencing, if you're going to fence with poplar, you'll be fencing every year. It's not sustainable, unless sustainable means you do the same thing on an ongoing basis, because it falls to bits.



This individual pointed out a rotting fencepost on their land; there was an irony in this representing sustainability. This was not simply wariness about permaculture, but a dismissal; this resident described their lifestyle philosophy as ‘living close to nature’.

However, such a response, along with other pick-and-choose approaches, reinforces that permaculture provided ideas to utilise at will. It did not completely define individual or communal practice. This ability to choose contributed to conflict over correct practice at times, but was also further evidence of ethical lifestyles developing differently for individuals. This was not just in the way that permaculture was not adhered to as a rigid method, but also as various people maintained different relationships to it as a framework. These opinions, and their outworking as various permaculture principles were practiced (or not) within the same community, demonstrated how ethical practice develops differently within individual experiences. This is a common course for permaculture adoption to take. Pickerill (2013) states that in some British communities, permaculture is not fully adopted because members cannot agree on finer points of what it is. Similarly, Jenkin (2011) describes how permaculture can clash with community members seeking independence and self-sufficiency, as they subsequently struggle to adhere to a framework.

### **Providing a Different Vision**

Permaculture extended what activities Whakatipu residents knew about, and helped them realise that their relationship with their environmental context did not need to be defined by consumer-capitalist practice. It was also evidence that a different way of life could theoretically structure life within their societal context. Haluza-DeLay and Berezan (2013) argue that lifestyles face continual pressure to revert to societal norms, for multiple reasons, including the requirement of consistent financial support. Most often, the reason is simply to make existence easier and more secure. Therefore, in a society where ecological awareness is valued less than achieving success within consumer-capitalism, “it is likely to be marginalized [...] unless there is a social field in which such an orientation does fit” (Haluza-DeLay & Berezan, 2013, p. 140). Permaculture existed as a philosophy independent from what consumer-capitalism promoted, creating a common reference point for eco-villagers, and a different set of ideas to those of consumer-capitalism. Haluza-Delay and Berezan state that “Environmentally consistent behaviour is similarly shaped by this interplay of agents and the field [...] The genius of permaculture is that it says a

different game is afoot” (2013, p. 143). Permaculture establishes different goals to consumer-capitalism, alongside different ways of attaining support for life, and a different way of thinking about human-environment relationships. It did not solve all Whakatipu’s problems, but inspired progress toward ecological lifestyles.

Learning about permaculture also helped eco-villagers practically develop their understanding of being embedded within their immediate natural environment. Permaculture, Haluza-DeLay and Berezan argue,

helps participants begin to learn their bioregion – what plants grow, how to deal with climatic conditions, where their food comes from, the direction of the sun, source of water and by extension, their energy sources, housing construction products, etc., that are elements of a sustainable lifestyle. (2013, p. 140)

This knowledge is critical when individuals (or a community) seek dependence on their immediate natural environment for survival, because people need to understand to function in relation to that environment. The process of doing so was shown when John stated, “it’s [...] making yourself part of that environment.” John described how permaculture required, and enabled, consideration of what it meant to live within specific environmental contexts:

It’s different for every different environment. Like, I think here, for what we’re doing, permaculture’s absolutely perfect. It’s very, very easy, because things grow here.

He also mentioned they did not need permaculture’s water-conserving methods, as their region had frequent rain, unlike Australia where permaculture originated. Therefore, the framework was flexible across different regions and environmental conditions. Practitioners need to develop understanding of their location’s characteristics, and how to integrate with, and manage, those for the mutual survival of themselves and environment.

## **Conclusion**

Eco-villagers’ dispositions for pursuing eco-lifestyles were strongly influenced by experiences throughout their lives, which made environmentalism a “natural” ethic. Additionally, these experiences brought about critical views on consumer-capitalism’s effects on the world, and a desire to create lifestyles that were

different and separate to this. This entailed developing practice specifically geared toward creating change – environmentally, personally and societally – within their surrounding contexts (or in Bourdieu’s terms, fields). For most, the focus was within their own land and community, but others also desired change within wider society. These motivations propelled eco-villagers’ dedicated lifestyle pursuit, which was further made possible by the financial capacity they possessed. Permaculture provided a roadmap for this eco-lifestyle, and for a world shaped by ecological living, that inspired and empowered residents to act on their motivations. As such, permaculture also helped eco-villagers understand how to create closer relationships with their immediate natural environment, and recognise that this environment provided their localised “preconditions of [...] existence” (Scoville, 2016, p. 835).

However, it was also evident that a paradox had emerged, as eco-villagers drew financial capacity for eco-lifestyles from the same consumer-capitalism context that they critiqued *with* these lifestyles. Discussion of this capacity showed individual perceptions emerging of what it meant for the wider societal change some residents desired. The adoption of permaculture also demonstrated different individual understandings of what eco-lifestyles were, illustrating diverse views within the community. The following chapter explores the new practices that Whakatipu developed, and how change was created through these. It also further discusses complications, individual variations and conflicts that arose when residents encountered limits to their practice.



## 5 Creating Change Through Eco-Living

Whakatipu's efforts at creating change were carried out by developing eco-lifestyles. Through the community's decision-making, day-to-day food production, waste management, and ecological building and infrastructure, eco-villagers created change in their lives, and within their environmental and social contexts. This reflected permaculture's influence, and a desire for increased self-sufficiency (and decreased reliance on mainstream provision). These practices also further established residents' integration with their immediate environment through localized supply networks and management of local ecological systems, such as the nutrient cycle. In Bourdieu's terms, we see a combined mobilisation of disposition and capacity, further empowered by permaculture's influence, enabling a context-specific habitus to form. This had enabled residents to develop lifestyles that were far more ecological than what they had before settling in Whakatipu.

However, numerous disagreements arose as residents individually responded to challenges and limitations as they saw best, leading to different approaches to eco-living throughout the community. Some variation was due to specific ethical prioritisations, or what change residents desired, while other variation was evidence of the limitations that eco-villagers faced in developing eco-lifestyles, and their complex relationship with consumer-capitalism (explored further in Chapter 6). This posed challenges for some ideals, such as consensus decision-making, and for those who desired a united community that might inspire wider societal change. Negotiating these challenges and disagreements as a community had been difficult, but demonstrated how Whakatipu had, to an extent, encompassed multiple perspectives.

Here, I explore these actions under three broad groupings: the initial way the community was defined, food and resource management systems that were set up, and the building and infrastructure practices that established Whakatipu as an eco-village.

### Importance of Initial Decisions

Members' motivations influenced how Whakatipu was set up in many ways, including the community's social organisation. Not all efforts here were successful, such as those involving egalitarian relationships and decision-making. However, these initial decisions contributed to change in many ways and helped shape Whakatipu's identity, while also showing why individual approaches became more prominent.

## **Location**

The nature of Whakatipu's location illustrated aspects of what members desired their community to accomplish. John described the decisions made by the initial group when purchasing land:

There were two things decided at that stage – it was going to be organic, and practicing permaculture.

Whakatipu also had to be near towns for schooling, employment and social opportunities, and to ensure the community's practices were visible to society. Whakatipu's location fulfilled these needs, among many more. The peninsula was isolated from neighbouring farms, from whence chemical sprays could blow over. Additionally, it could be easily kept free of possums. The land also appealed because it was degraded, having been a dairy farm run-off block. This presented challenges, but also opportunities, to reshape the land according to ecological ideals:

*Katherine:* When we first arrived, this place was pretty frightening. It was a bull run-off, and there were no fences around any of the streams, so the cattle just could run through... there was a lot of erosion. The soil was bad, and when there was a heavy downpour, you could see big plumes of orange clay water going into the harbour. You could see big clods of clay from where the cattle had loosened the grass around the edges of the streams, so a phenomenal amount of sediment was going into the estuary – we've stopped all that.

Katherine has seen her immediate environment change into something much closer to her ideal. Residents spoke similarly about re-planting native trees. In this way, change was created within Whakatipu's immediate surroundings, which addressed environmental destruction caused by mainstream farming. It also raised awareness of what the health of residents' land required, and how they directly contributed to that.

## **Creating an Egalitarian Community**

The eco-village was socially organised according to ideals of egalitarianism and co-operation. While communal living was not desired, members still sought to practice sharing and cooperation, out of a desire for healthy relationships, and to critique the mainstream's competition model. As with many eco-villages, decision-making was conducted by consensus, and disputes settled at community meetings. Pursuing this lifestyle as a community had clear advantages:

*Katherine:* We thought the power of a group of people being able to buy a really good piece of land, and being able to do things together – set up an orchard, buy machinery – just makes things a lot more affordable. To do it as an individual is very difficult.

Other intentional communities have similar motivations for collectively pursuing alternative lifestyles. While some people desire co-operative community for the sake of close relationships in-and-of themselves, they also find sustainability easier to pursue as a community (Hong & Vicdan, 2016, p. 131). Similar to what Katherine stated above, Webb's participants were happy they could purchase rural land together that they could not individually afford (1999, p. 34).

Desire for co-operation entailed the intention to create small-scale businesses within Whakatipu that could provide non-mainstream employment, and allow the community to produce ecologically-sound goods for itself. This had not actually eventuated (due to reasons I discuss soon), but would have further integrated Whakatipu within the local economy (which Brown (2002a) proposes is a necessary action for intentional communities) and been part of establishing local supply networks (something which occurs in many other ways, as I explore).

### **Challenges with Community**

However, some Whakatipu residents had come to see both of these ideals as unrealistic, and contributing to conflict. Many felt consensus decision-making led to a 'vote of one', as a single 'against' vote would veto an entire community project:

People always come from a different angle – it's quite stifling. For instance, it took us five years to decide on the power [whether to use community funds to connect every member to the power grid].

With a small group of people, I think consensus might be achievable. But when the group starts to get bigger, it's almost impossible to get everybody to agree to something. It just ends up catering to the lowest common denominator.

In the meeting I attended, a vote was vetoed multiple times, a response of 'I will not allow this decision.' This was chosen over another possible option in the voting process, a more neutral 'the decision can go ahead without me' vote that would allow

change for those who wanted it. This quickly frustrated other members, given that vetoes had become the norm. Residents quickly pointed out to me that the limits of consensus for creating community development were worth exploring in regards to how the community negotiated ideals in practice.

As discussed in Chapter One, many communities start with consensus ideals, only to struggle with them later on (as people grow and change) (Hong & Vicdan, 2016; Sargisson & Sargent, 2004; Webb, 1999). As such, consensus has been defined differently in various communities, sometimes as a result of addressing the problem to achieve more progress. The older community of Riverside, for example, does not allow a single person veto (Sargisson & Sargent, 2004, p. 106). Several Whakatipu members raised this approach as an option, but doubted their current membership would collectively accept it. Webb also states that her community developed a written definition which said “Consensus is an agreement to reach agreement” (1999, p. 92). However, this did not rule out the ignoring of opinions, or criticising proposals without presenting alternatives. Overall, struggles with consensus affected the social fabric of Whakatipu, further spurring individualistic lifestyle pursuits rather than co-operative ones, something observed in other intentional community studies (Jones, 2011, p. 202). As a result, many members had come to favour a pragmatic approach to decision-making where compromise could occur; however, who should compromise was still debated. Similarly, Whakatipu’s collaborative business projects never got underway:

A driving force was to set up communally run businesses so that people in the village could get an income. But it ended up taking seven years to sell all the lots, and people came in drips and drabs – some people bought land but never came. Ideas at the beginning were perhaps idealistic, but the reality was a bit more difficult.

Developing businesses would have helped achieve further social and economic sustainability, and lessened residents’ need for mainstream employment. However, lack of co-operation, among other difficulties, contributed to many still needing outside jobs. This meant another aspect of self-sufficiency, and consumer-capitalist critique, was not achieved. It is interesting to note, however, that even when communities have established small-scale cottage industries, they have not provided for all financial needs (Webb, 1999, p. 38).

Attempts to create community in Whakatipu were therefore another area of lifestyle that had come to be defined by individual approaches. However, in this instance, individualism actually inhibited residents achieving many personal ideals. Most residents lamented community conflict, and some felt that it meant Whakatipu was dysfunctional. Webb notes similar reactions in her communities, as they identified as pacifists (1999, p. 83). Various legal entities, such as an incorporated society and (at one point) a company, had been sought or created by Whakatipu to protect community assets, and appease members who wanted protection from liability. Many resented these formalities, and had not envisaged them when establishing Whakatipu. Conflict also stemmed from lack of agreement about what constituted 'correct' ethical practice, as I discuss in this chapter. Numerous individual differences played into these disagreements, however the experience of communities shows this to be normal. Conflict can also be productive (Sargisson & Sargent, 2004, p. 139). Negotiating these individual differences had been a strong influence on Whakatipu residents developing pragmatic approaches to resolving conflict, and understanding the importance of social relations within a pursuit of holistic sustainability.

## **Food, Waste and Trading: Creating New Subsistence**

A central part of Whakatipu's critique of mainstream consumer-capitalist practice was creating alternative provision of food and other resources. Related to this were waste management and local trading within Whakatipu and its surrounding area. These activities contributed to eco-lifestyles by providing residents with increasingly self-sufficient, local subsistence, and helped establish an integrated relationship with their environment. In this way, personal change was created as individuals required less mainstream provision, and contributed less to the mainstream status quo they disagreed with. Change was shown in the way that the environment's natural processes had been harnessed to create a closer interdependent relationship between eco-villagers and their land.

However, challenges and disagreement arose due to different emphases on what ethical concerns actually were, and correct approaches to create change. Different perspectives on meat-eating, for example, showed some residents understood their relationships with societal and environmental context differently, and therefore had different understandings of what was actually ecological in this area.

## Gardening

Self-sufficient food and resource production were fundamental aims in Whakatipu:

*Kurt:* One thing is, what am I doing myself, for starters, to provide everything from what's been produced closest by, and then in a proper way, which is at least organic.

*Katherine:* This place is becoming more and more self-sufficient. There's more and more fruit trees, huge gardens, animals everywhere. If the world did go to pot, you've got a good chance of surviving here.

Katherine's gardening reflected a desire for self-sufficiency, shared by most residents, and was part of critiquing mainstream society's reliance on corporate, chemically treated agriculture. Many properties had raised garden beds, orchards, and animals, all permaculture-influenced. Additionally, Whakatipu had communally-run orchards that provided apple juice for all members. There was also a cattle-owning collective who ran a herd on communal land.

Gardening was a key job for me as a WWOOFer. With John and Katherine, this included clearing garden beds, putting down recycled weed-matting on pathways, setting up old tractor tyres as new garden beds, and pruning trees. I also helped with most stages of Erich and Philippa's food production, involving several crops and animals. Gardening there started with clearing garden beds, and ploughing soil. We



Figure 3. Half of John and Katherine's main garden. In addition, they had orchards and timber plantations as well. In the background is the tidal inlet.



then filled the ploughed channels with compost, and covered them with recycled carpet until Philippa decided to plant – she kept a comprehensive diary that tracked crop success over earlier seasons. I tended tomato, chilli, and asparagus crops at different stages; the chilli and asparagus provided great September harvests (although the asparagus almost didn't due to my overzealous weeding). At one point, two roosters needed killing, which required a team effort for catching, beheading, and plucking. Erich made cheese and brewed a number of beers and wines, which I enjoyed while I was there. I was able to watch Erich concoct his specialty cheese, cultivated by using whatever bacteria was present in the raw milk as the fermenting agent (something some residents were not so sure about the safety of).

Other eco-villagers made similar food, and had experimented with diverse crops such as nuts and bananas. When another WWOOFer and I shifted some tree cuttings for Gerrald, I saw what was regarded as the most extensive garden in Whakatipu, tended by Gerrald and his wife Lee:

*Gerrald:* I have two big orchards. With Lee, I have now much more vegetable gardens than before. I built a glasshouse for Lee, chicken runs... for the ducks, something.

Lee had a huge variety of Chinese crops, which she loved sharing with other residents, and often recommended how to eat them. One item I spotted was a coarse, sponge-like plant, which Lee explained was dried out and used as a scrubbing brush. When I stayed with John and Katherine, Lee gave them a bag of crispy roots that tasted like pear. We never quite grasped what it was called.

Producing one's own food contributed to personal, societal and environmental change. It lessened residents' reliance on the corporate agriculture food supply chain, as they no longer had to buy many things. This meant they were less dependent on that system, should it cease to work, and contributed less to its continued success. Because their gardening was organic, their need for sustenance did not create chemical pollution, typical of corporate agriculture, in their environment. Gardening was also a central part of residents' integration with their environment, and how they developed a greater understanding of "the preconditions of [their] existence" (Scoville, 2016, p. 835). They were aware of their immediate environment's conditions, the cycles for planting and harvesting, and what their crops needed

(evidenced by Philippa's planting diary). Frank mentioned that seeking this understanding was difficult, but necessary for survival:

We're not actually farmers. In fact, we're learners, because if we're not farmers, we better learn bloody quickly. But of course you learn bloody slowly.

Producing food also contributed to an understanding of connection to the local environment by helping create a localised supply network, something I expand upon when discussing localised trade.

### **Compost and Waste Disposal**

Whakatipu placed enormous emphasis on composting, which alongside water management, was central to the process of creating closed nutrient cycles:

*John:* It's about closing that nutrient cycle. In the city, your water comes in from the outside. The water that falls on your roof is a problem and is piped away. All your shit is also piped out, and it goes probably twenty or thirty kilometres away. It's a massively energy intensive operation to break that down, and what doesn't get put in the water gets taken away and dumped in various places. It's so incredibly unsustainable, that you just wonder how it ever got that bad.

Composting food scraps and sewerage minimized waste and maintained a healthy garden. My main job for Erich and Philippa was composting, which involved its own harvest. They built enormous mounds out of their region's invasive kikuyu grass which competed with their crops, and covered them in carpet. After partially decomposing, it was transferred to smaller mounds for more enriched decomposition with hay and other cast-off plants. Neighbours envied these mounds; one, for example, saw me building them, and asked before an interview, "How do they get them so square?" Properties also had ponds that acted as nutrient catchments:

*Katherine:* All those nutrients are collected in ponds, and we have a weed called azolla that grows on the pond, that utilizes the nutrients that collect. We harvest the azolla and put it on the garden as a thick layer of mulch.



As per permaculture instruction, these were constructed at key low points of the land, so that water naturally found its way there, and brought nutrients with it. Harvesting azolla transferred nutrients within a closed cycle, taking them back to the garden.

While composting is common in wider society, composting sewerage is virtually unheard of, and it was completely new practice for me to encounter in Whakatipu. Every house had a composting toilet, usually a bin underneath a conventional seat. To stop it smelling, urine was usually separated from faeces (which sometimes meant urinating outside). Hay or sawdust was added to the bin to begin composting, which would later be emptied into another composting (or vermicomposting<sup>20</sup>) area. Maria described the benefits of this:

I've got a very basic composting toilet. It's quite horrible... It was just temporary, and it's never had anything done to it. But, I just say, "Joe, come and please do it," and you see how quickly it all breaks down – it's breaking down while you're still using it, because you put untreated saw dust in there. My son said to me, "Doesn't that put you off, having compost made out of that?" I said, "No, because by the time it's in the garden, you wouldn't know what it had originally been." I mean, I'm only eating what's growing in the garden, so it's all going round and round, really!



*Figure 4.* Two compost piles that I helped build. The cubic shape maximises decomposition efficiency, as heat rises. Layers of mustard and hay add to the structural integrity. Also, note the garden patch in the background, bordered by a woven stick fence.

<sup>20</sup> A composting process which includes the introduction of various worm species.

“It’s all going round and round” referred, once again, to closed nutrient cycles, and how Maria herself played a role in this. Joe showed me his vermicomposting run-off area, which used bamboo as a filtering crop. He held strong views on composting toilets:

I will never go back to a bloody flushing toilet! You are kidding me. Dry-composting toilets should be mandatory, especially in the country.

John and Katherine used plumbing to direct sewerage to their vermicomposting system. This system illustrated John and Katherine’s lifestyle philosophy, where they wanted systems that achieved both comfort and sustainability. They hoped adaptations like this would show visitors that eco-lifestyles were not necessarily uncomfortable. While other toilets I used were not uncomfortable (although, I never emptied one), theirs was the closest to what I was used to.

While many eco-villagers kept animals to eat, they also played central roles in waste management and the creation of closed nutrient cycles:

*Katherine:* We’ve got pigs in the orchard – nobody particularly likes the pigs, they’re annoying. But, they keep the grass down, and we feed them all our bits from the kitchen. They poo all over the place, which fertilizes the trees. Then a pond collects the runoff, so that’s a closed system. They look after the orchard in a number of ways. We don’t use the lawn mower, or very rarely. We just bring the horses up, they’re our ride-on lawn mowers. They do a really good job – we hardly ever have to mow the lawns.

*John:* And they leave their compost behind them.

Many kept ducks and chickens for similar purposes. Chickens ate scraps, and whenever Erich and I began shifting a pile of half-decomposed kikuyu, his ducks would immediately search for slugs and snails (while his dog hunted for rats). One member quoted permaculture founder Bill Mollison, who said there is never “an excess of snails but a deficiency of ducks” (Holmgren, 2002, p. 111).

Whakatipu’s composting and recycling was a reaction to the idea that mainstream society wastes too much, consumes mindlessly, and is unconcerned with the fate of their waste. Composting was therefore an attempt by residents to establish a new awareness of waste, and put this into practice. For those who desired wider influence, it was a chance to demonstrate waste minimization could be done (and comfortably). This in-and-of itself encapsulated an understanding of human waste’s





*Figure 5. Erich and Philippa's team of ducks.*

impact on the environment, and that people can actually manage waste efficiently on their own land. Repurposing waste also showed understanding that their land was healthiest when nutrients remained cycling within it. Both aspects of this – the critique of wider societal practices, and understanding of environmental benefit from proper waste management – are informed by John’s initial quote where he discussed nutrient cycles: “It’s so incredibly unsustainable, that you just wonder how it ever got that bad.” Permaculture co-founder Bill Mollison combined these concerns by defining “a pollutant as ‘an output of any system component that is not being used productively by any other component of the system’” (Holmgren, 2002, p. 111). In this permaculture perspective, any waste not biologically or economically repurposed is ultimately a problem, a pollutant. As noted, composting is practiced within mainstream society, but not yet as comprehensively as what Whakatipu’s approach entailed.

## Local Trading

Residents sometimes traded excess produce, scarce items, and specialised labour. Gerrald and Lee grew vegetables in their diverse garden that no one else did, which attracted trade with others in Whakatipu:

*Gerrald:* Lee does a lot here with vegetables, chicken and eggs, and then other people come, and maybe buy some for a dollar, or bring some other stuff – so, swap something.

Trading took place along particular networks, depending on friendships, and the skills individuals had:

*Maria:* I do a lot of bottling... I don't make them unless I get the fruit for free. Frank brought me his crab apples, red guavas, and quinces, and gave me some sugar, and I supply sugar as well, and then I gave him a few. I was making sweet chilli sauce, and Erich gave me wine that he'd made. And my girl-friend who had chooks that continually laid, I'd get eggs from her. I think it goes on quite a bit. Just little things, you know? "Look, I've got such-and-such."

Joe discussed the 'green dollars' concept, where he traded with neighbours, or beyond the village. Being a butcher, he did home-kills for local farmers, who then gave him free meat. Another couple were developing an organic café in the town near Whakatipu, to use excess produce. This would provide public exposure, and some income, for the community. I contributed to this project by doing some interior mosaic artwork, and helping to convert a shipping container into a new kitchen.

The concept of mutual exchange without profit, which some residents sought in their trading as discussed here, was a critical reaction to capitalist practices. Eco-villagers were keen to establish this as a commonplace activity to distribute excess, share skills, and ultimately achieve further self-sufficiency. Other practices that might still involve profit, such as the café, contributed to decentralized, local production networks as a form of change. This network, incorporating the community and others in the area, meant goods were consumed near where they were produced. This reduced reliance on outside employment and purchasing, as a variety of produce was available in Whakatipu because individuals had specialised production. Another impetus for decentralization is that, by relying less on global trade, those who produced and consumed within local supply networks did not increase demand for the

oil-fuelled mass transit of goods that holds global trade together (Schumacher, 1993). Eco-villagers singled out travel and transport as part of unethical consumer-capitalist practice:

*David:* It's about producing as much as we can on this site, and minimizing bringing stuff in, whether that be food, or garden fertilizer, whatever. Also, it's about trying to minimize the amount of commuting we do. At the moment, I do a lot of commuting in a car, which I want to minimize, because that's not a good thing on a number of levels.

Whakatipu had meaningfully contributed to localised trade in the region, and it was a central focus for them. Logan said this adjusted thinking around self-sufficiency, and allowed community self-sufficiency to develop further:

I'm a great believer in 'you can do all these things to survive, when everything collapses'. But, really, what's going to survive is a community – and a wider community as well. So that's what you need, have all those connections. The whole idea of self-sustainability is not really accurate.

I had expected to see more internal sharing in Whakatipu, in accordance with a communal, self-sufficient life. However, individualisation meant people primarily looked after their own sustenance. This still involved participating in the localised supply network, but more as a trade-based system rather than communal, co-operative production. The community orchard was still used, and the apple harvest was divided up among members as vast quantities of apple juice; however some residents said that other fruit harvests were somewhat neglected. Webb describes how her community had greater levels of sharing initially; however, in the later stage, when she researched, sharing had become “day by day generosity”, a simple exchange and distribution of surplus (1999, p. 52). This appeared to be a stable status quo that members willingly took part in, and also describes Whakatipu's exchange.

However, residents found difficulty in subsisting *solely* off their production and trade. For example, Gerrald mentioned foods he wanted, but couldn't produce:

At the beginning, I came to New Zealand, was running through the nursery – bought hazelnut trees, walnut trees, almond trees. The tree grows nice, but there is no fruit, because we don't have enough frosts in winter.

Gerrald, and others, bought what they could not produce from elsewhere. Several households formed an organic food-buying co-op. I attended a co-op meeting at Erich and Philippa's, where their next bi-monthly purchase was planned. Requests were logged on an online spreadsheet beforehand, and the meeting confirmed the final purchase. Products could only be purchased in set bulk amounts, often more than a single household needed. People had to co-operate in their purchasing, and dividing it up when delivered, which was a restrictive process. If someone wanted two kilograms of almonds, and almonds only came in five-kilogram batches, they had to convince others to buy into that five kilograms, or buy it all themselves. In the meeting I attended, several people abandoned purchases because others did not want that product. Gerrald found other limitations with the co-op, for example, he did not like organic sugar as much as regular sugar, because he had a particularly "sweet tooth."

### **Challenges and Disagreement**

Ultimately, as described above, residents faced the challenge that subsistence practices could not provide for everyone's food and consumption needs. Despite the extensive work to create alternative provision of food and other goods, there were many needs and tastes that their production could not cater to. It is common for intentional communities to discover they cannot achieve full self-sufficiency, even in things like food (Hong & Vicdan, 2016, p. 134). Initially, some Whakatipu residents hoped they could do so, but navigating the limitations of their environment, socioeconomic context, and personal ability showed it to be impossible (a point further explored in Chapter 6). While the food co-op could provide extra organic food that eco-villagers could not grow, this was neither local nor self-sufficient, and required money. This contributed to the need for mainstream involvement. Similarly, residents could not end dependence on things like employment and travel, which entailed unethical actions like petrol consumption, because they remained necessary for survival. Wrestling with such difficulties produced an understanding of holistic sustainability, where pursuing completely ecologically self-sufficient living had to be balanced with economic survival. This required eco-villagers to be pragmatic about what self-provision they attempted and prioritised.

Other difficulties here related to individual variations on what ethical production meant. While organic food production was standard within Whakatipu, meat production and consumption was contested. Most residents ate meat, the



majority of which was home-grown, home-killed, locally butchered, or caught. Joe, an ex-professional butcher, had four pigs, two sheep, numerous chickens, and ducks. Farming animals for food was central to his ethic, as he took pride in ‘using the whole animal’ with a bone carving business using animals he’d butchered. The cattle herd on community land was an investment for those involved, and provided meat. During my stay, a bull had just been butchered, and Erich and Philippa received a supply of salami. However, several vegetarian residents were at odds with their neighbours:

*Leon:* The meat industry, morally and spiritually, is totally unacceptable. From an environmental point of view, it’s the most destructive way of eating, particularly in a country like New Zealand. By far, the biggest amount of greenhouse gases are produced by the meat industry, coupled with chopping down forests to grow grass. Being a meat-eater is by far the most destructive thing you can do to the planet... I think some people here believe they are doing everything right, now – but they’re still eating meat.



*Figure 6.* A 'surprise' calf that Katherine and I rescued, after a neighbouring farmer saw it newly-born in a paddock. Katherine was part of the cattle collective, and this unexpected calf would increase the size of the herd if it survived.

*Harry*: It's not the 'killing the bobby calves'; it's more living lightly on the planet. It's the methane emissions, and the forest depletion.

While those who ate meat saw their localized production and consumption as a sustainable practice due to the amount of land they had, vegetarians saw meat as unethical on a wider scale; their view was that if Whakatipu were to lead by example, they should not undertake activities that most outside the community could only do unsustainably. I felt this view may have had a subtle influence at a community meeting I attended, where some vegetarian members presented their desire to privately own their share of community land to plant trees. I wondered if this hinted opposition to cattle farming on 'their share.'

Other studies do not discuss the same contention over eating meat emerging in other intentional communities. Litfin (2014) notes numerous approaches toward eating meat in the communities she visited, but they were largely homogenous *within* communities. However, other disagreements over the correct way to farm or garden have been recorded. Sargisson and Sargent (2004, pp. 104-105) detail disagreement over organic food in New Zealand's Riverside community. There, older members did not want to shift to organic farming, while newer members did. They eventually did shift when the effects of chemicals on food became understood. In Whakatipu, resolution meant agreeing to disagree. While this affected how residents viewed their community identity, and how they thought they might be seen from the outside, it did not lead to an end to the community. It was, however, another instance where the community's conception of eco-lifestyle had encompassed individual variation.

## **Building, Water and Electricity: Treating the Environment Differently**

Alongside creating self-sufficient provision through local environmental and social networks, Whakatipu created eco-lifestyles with their buildings and infrastructure. These elements further established local supply networks and, due to requiring knowledge of the area's natural characteristics, demonstrated how residents had developed an understanding of their environment. They also represent key changes made by residents in regards to acting against mainstream building and infrastructure paradigms. However there were challenges and disagreements



experienced here in regards to electricity supplies and treated timber usage, which showed some of the more divided perspectives that residents discussed with me.

### **Water and Electricity Infrastructure**

Eco-villagers used alternative electrical and plumbing infrastructure in their homes, seeking to keep the standard of living provided by these amenities, but without drawing on outside systems. Some residents felt there was a stigma in wider society toward eco-villages, because people thought eco-villagers lived without electricity, and with limited water:

*John:* I like when people come and they're really surprised by the way we live. They're not expecting that things would be high-tech, and that the functions are actually basic, and low energy, but everything works really well.

Contrary to such stereotypes, Whakatipu had ample water and mostly-ample electricity supplies. Residents used rainfall collection tanks to supply their water, which is standard for rural areas. John and Katherine's reservoirs, for example, held 100,000 litres. Conserving water was only important to some, as their region had a lot of rain, so those with a lot of storage used as much water as they wanted. Others were more careful about water they used, especially if it was heated.

Many households heated water with solar panels, although John and Katherine's guest shower had a backup electric water heater for the winter.

*Katherine:* Water-heating solar panels should be mandatory.

*John:* That should be mandatory, a prerequisite.

*Katherine:* Because that's half of normal power usage.

*John:* We don't use electricity for heating water.

*Katherine:* Well, you [referring to me] do at the moment, because there's no sun.

*John:* Yeah, except when you push that red button. Have you pressed it?

The red button was actually black, and was a relief in winter; it meant a dose of water bypassed the solar panel and was heated on-demand. When I asked another WWOOFer if he'd had enough hot water, he replied that he'd pushed it three times. Many properties had wetbacks installed on fireplaces; my room at Erich and Philippa's had one, which meant getting a fire roaring in a pot-belly stove for an hour before showers.

All eco-villagers I met had some form of off-grid electrical system, usually solar-panel arrays<sup>21</sup>, for their individual properties. Going off-grid meant using less centrally provided energy, seen as an unethical ‘weight-on-the-earth’ by some, and utilizing solar energy they could collect within their properties:

*John:* If you decentralize the power generation grid, and produce it all over the country, it’ll be much more efficient. Your transmission losses will be much less, and for the price of a new power station, they could put solar panels on just about every house. It’s got to be more sustainable and more efficient.

*Kurt:* You do not take from the grid, and all the things involved in setting up the grid, fossil fuels, and long lines, and whatever. Decentral.

*David:* We’ve got a completely self-sufficient house here, with off-grid solar. So, we’ve invested in that, and hopefully that will keep us going for a long time.

As David mentioned, “off-grid solar” was a single-purchase investment that eliminated ongoing electricity purchasing. This appealed for cutting costs:

*Harry:* We started a solar water heating business. We really rushed into it, because we thought we’d be deluged with orders to deal with climate change. But it never happened. It was, I’d say, an act of sabotage by both flavours of government. Our sales line was, “If you’re old, and have got money, why not invest in something that returns a non-taxable benefit? That can’t be swindled away from you, off your roof?” (laughs). Minimise your outgoings, instead of maximising your income.



*Figure 7.* My room at Erich and Philippa's, off the side of their barn. The pot-bellied stove is to the left.

<sup>21</sup> At one point, a member tried to set up a wind turbine, but it was ineffective and noisy.

A central change that residents sought here is clearly spelled out in their responses – they wanted to create a decentralized power supply separate from centralised electricity infrastructure, and therefore reduce (or eliminate) their support of a system that still used fossil fuels and other resources. Kurt explored how this shift developed new behaviours in using electricity, and considered its wider benefits:

The gain is you use less power, because the power we use is peanuts compared with the villagers on the grid. We don't just switch things on, we think about it. My 20 watt halogen, if I have it on the whole evening... 10 times 20 watt, that's 200 watt. 200 watt wears on your battery. So, awareness that your power is a limited thing, and depends on what the weather's been like, and what your consumption is, that's where the saving is. Not just the mechanics of it – if everybody only used the 1-kilowatt a day that I use, instead of 15 or what the average is, then our power problem would be solved. Not because everybody should go on alternative power, no – everybody should slash his consumption by 80 per cent. Then you'd be where we are!

Kurt, and others, believed they were creating a power-supply system that would cut demand, and therefore reduce the need for inefficient supply. They felt this was an effectively smarter, more ecological approach. This was intrinsically connected to the idea that provision of power and water should not be centralized, because all required resources could be gathered from a household's own land. Therefore, a consciousness about what their environment provided for human use was evident here.

### **Challenges and Disagreement with Electricity**

Going off-grid was complicated, however, as some members had a stronger stance on off-grid systems than others. Some members saw drawing on centralized electricity as compatible with their ecological ethics:

*John:* It's a peculiarity of where we live, that we have enough solar energy falling on our roof to heat all our water easily. We've got photo-voltaics, which is probably about half our power usage, but we're on the grid for convenience.

The grid provided consistent regulated current for devices that required this,<sup>22</sup> and convenience for when it was overcast. Residents who were on-grid subscribed to Meridian Energy, which only generates electricity from renewable sources.

Not all residents saw connection to the grid as ethical. While individuals could freely decide on this, it was a collective concern when the community started. It was initially proposed that community funds (the additional pooled money required at buy-in) would cover the cost of connecting everyone. The decision was eventually made to end and divide the community fund, and let members decide individually whether or not to connect. This was so contested that members referred to it years later (when I was there) when discussing how they negotiated disagreement:

*Erich:* Things are a bit more complicated than we thought they would be. A good example is, we had this long debate in the eco-village over a couple of years... Should we go on the grid, or, should we have stand alone alternative systems? The longer we looked at it, the more complicated things got. In the end, we decided we couldn't really decide it, and needed to let everybody do what they wanted. It wasn't black and white at all. The result was the majority of people decided to go on the grid, and quite a small group decided, "We're going to have alternative systems." That was a good decision at the time.

Whether or not members connected to the grid did not eliminate compromise over power usage. Some still required more power than solar panels could supply. One off-grid household, for example, used a diesel generator when it was overcast. Some members who connected to the grid, but did not burn diesel, saw this as problematic. Ultimately, there was no approach that worked for everyone. Residents were open about this, and discussed how it led them to consider pragmatic perspectives on sustainability. However, the *most* suitable way to meet ideals was still unresolved: was it more ethical to go on-grid, use a generator, or forego electricity?

This shows how residents individually balanced their ideals with what actions appeared possible within their context. Some eco-villagers mentioned that some anti-grid residents came from Europe, and may have had a perception that grid-power inherently involved nuclear energy. Whakatipu members had to negotiate this difference to stay together as a community, particularly due to the weighty financial decisions involved. Not all were happy with this, and some linked splitting the

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<sup>22</sup> Some power systems were not very stable, which I discovered when one melted my phone charger.

community funds to the lack of communal business development. Other eco-villages, while building off-grid systems, generally utilise grid connections as well. Out of all the eco-villages that Litfin visited, only one was not on-grid; for many, however, this was so they could sell their surplus energy back (2014, p. 48).

## **Building**

Members built individually on their own properties, by-and-large with permaculture ideals in mind. John and Katherine took great joy in explaining their home's design, particularly the influence of permaculture and nautical knowledge that they had gleaned while sailing in the Pacific, before moving to Whakatipu:

*John:* The design process was really cool, because we both clicked with a lot of stuff. We already knew, because of sailing on the boat, the celestial navigation thing, the declination of the sun for whatever latitude you're on. Passive solar combined with sun angles, what direction to point your house – we approached that really scientifically. We're five degrees east of north, to catch more morning sun than afternoon sun, and the eaves are the perfect length so that you don't get sun in summer. Around the equinox, it starts to shade off on the summer side, and on the winter side you get all the sun through the windows. It makes a huge difference. The whole house is designed around that concept.

This design meant the house self-regulated its temperature year-round. John expanded on this with the concept of thermal mass:

With our eaves worked out the right length, and dark tiles on the north side of the house, and lots of glass there, the sun shines in the morning, hits the dark tiles, and warms the whole place up. That heat is stored in the concrete, which is quite substantial. It's got a hundred millimetres of pumice underneath it, which works really well, because the whole floor hovers around the twenty/twenty two-degree mark. It doesn't change all year around, so with the thermal mass of the solid walls inside as well, the house stays at a comfortable temperature all the time, as long as you light a fire at night. If you have a couple of days where it's really cold and cloudy, and you don't get solar energy coming in, you have to replace that. That's the downside of thermal mass: if you let it get cold, it's a hard job to get it back again.

Many eco-villagers employed thermal mass in their house designs, which stored heat and released it gradually throughout the day if the right actions, such as lighting a fire, were taken. John and Katherine generally needed to light only their kitchen stove to maintain twenty-two degrees Celsius. Several residents couldn't understand why thermal mass design was not more widespread, arguing that the power and firewood saved was impressive. John and Katherine once had a group of architecture students tour their house, who left complaining that their school had neglected to teach these design techniques. John and Katherine pointed to this as an event where they had influenced people outside the community, and also as evidence that 'common sense' design was neglected in mainstream building practice.

Building in Whakatipu incorporated a strong 'Do-It-Yourself' (DIY) attitude, a component of self-sufficiency. John said paying a builder to undertake Whakatipu's projects would be completely unaffordable. He mentioned an approach he took, where he asked any tradesperson required if he could work alongside them to practice the relevant skill, so that next time he could attempt the job himself. DIY also meant eco-villagers could employ unconventional materials, designs, and standards. Undertaking such extensive work without qualifications, however, posed legal challenges:

*Katherine:* That's our own design, we consider it better than anything else around. We haven't got it passed [by building inspection]... it's got no certificate. But we know it's better.

*John:* When we go for final certification of this house, I'm going to experiment, because they're going to ask for producer statements. So I'm going produce my own producer statements.

*Katherine:* (laughs)

*John:* For plumbing, the sewerage treatment systems, the beams, all that stuff. I'll just say, "Nope. You can't say I'm not qualified to do this. I'm giving you a producer statement. I'm prepared to take responsibility for this, for fifty years." How can you possibly lose? How can you complain about that? It will be an experiment, it'll be interesting to see what the council says.

John mentioned features that he and Katherine had designed, including their enormous untreated truss beams, that meant their house was unlikely to receive certification. However, they said the timber grade used was well over the required standard. Katherine said they were lucky to find an engineer to approve their beams,

despite them not necessarily conforming to the code.<sup>23</sup> Risks with DIY and certification were somewhat mitigated by the fact that John and Katherine never intend to have to produce a certificate, because they intend never to sell.

While some residents took more conventional approaches, most standards were beyond building code requirements, and most residents had built their houses with long-term lifespans in mind. This connected to permaculture ideals:

*Katherine:* We have not built for profit, or built for resale. We've done it with the view that this house will probably be around in five hundred years. Lots of people will use it, and we've built it to last. We've thought a lot about the design to future-proof it.

Materials and designs were therefore key. Sustainably sourced materials, including products that entailed minimal waste or energy consumption to make, were sought, including earthen bricks, untreated timber, straw-bales, and recycled materials. John and Katherine even had old hardwood telephone poles holding up the apex of their roof. Recycling has been part of debate over correct ethics though, as I explore soon.

As with decentralized local food, energy and water networks, decentralized building supply chains were sought. David discussed how the process occurred as he established his property:

We've felled some gum trees, we've had them milled up, so we haven't used any treated timber. We've used stuff from not too far away, and had it milled at a local mill. That's been quite satisfying. We maybe wouldn't have done that if we didn't have the guidelines, but that's been quite satisfying.

Using local materials, and being consciously involved in their production, was one way change was created through building practices; however, another way was emphasising longevity and smart design in ways uncommon in the mainstream. The reaction of the students 'discovering' the design methods of John and Katherine's house demonstrated this. Similarly, while there are very old houses throughout Western society, current building practices do not incorporate the same emphasis on longevity and environmental integration as Whakatipu's building practices. Kaspar describes how eco-village homes are evidence of, and further create, alternative thinking in their owners:

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<sup>23</sup> A different process to having a builder provide a producer statement for final certification.



What is different, however, are the habits of thought that govern the homes people build and the way they live in them. The thoughtful use of recycled materials, solar aspect, and innovative technologies distinguish ecovillage homes from the average American home. (2008, p. 18)

Through demonstrating these methods and principles to visitors, members hoped to show the benefits of their building methods, so that more environmentally integrated designs might grow in popularity. In some ways, this had already started, as their homes were receiving positive attention within the region. Multiple times, residents brought up a story about how a nearby property had won a New Zealand architecture award despite it being, in their view, nothing more than two black cubes in a paddock. When the national news interviewed a local farmer about what he thought of the property, he scoffed, and said, “They should have gone to see some of the houses in the eco-village over there, those are far more deserving.”

### **Challenges and Disagreement with Timber**

Another major disagreement took place over treated timber. The community agreements referred to earlier by David state:

With the exception of boron treated timber, use of new treated (tanalised, LOSP etc.) timber [...] is strongly discouraged within the village. In the case of [community land], where all other reasonable options to treated timber have been fully considered, use of new treated timber will be considered by the meeting on a case basis. (Whakatipu Community Agreements, March 2013)

While not a ban, this was an expectation of how treated timber was to be regarded. Treating timber uses chemicals that leach into the environment, which continues while it is in use. Disposing of treated timber also leaches chemicals in landfill, or pollutes the atmosphere if burnt. Under these agreements, members had not used *new* treated timber on building projects until the time of my fieldwork. While I was there, someone used treated timber after having difficulty obtaining un-treated hardwood that conformed to building code standards, and due to thinking untreated timber would inevitably rot.<sup>24</sup> This greatly concerned other residents:

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<sup>24</sup> How accurate this assessment was is unclear – everyone else in the community used specific untreated hardwood types that were not prone to rotting, and had taken further steps to ensure against this.



I believe [in leading] by example. That was an objective of the eco-village, that we were open for the public. People could come see how we live. Now, we have somebody here who used treated timber... I'm so disappointed, honestly. I'm nearly devastated. I think, "God, how can that happen," you know? How can he be allowed to use that in an eco-village? I think that's a really major thing! I would never take anybody to show his place to. I would be embarrassed, living in an eco-village, where somebody is using that stuff, because of their own personal reasons. I will tell them that one day, honestly.

The desire to present consistent ethical practice to wider society made this an emotive issue, as most residents saw using treated timber as strongly unethical. That Whakatipu had agreements against using wood, and was theoretically meant to be a community that showed treated timber was not necessary, was therefore a central reason for why these residents valued living there.

There are numerous angles to take on this challenge, but an integral one, which I explore further in Chapter 6, is that requiring timber which met building code standards clearly indicated a contextual limitation on eco-living. Individuals were definitely willing to go to different lengths to meet this requirement. Other members found ways to incorporate untreated timber in their designs (although some did not receive certification), and perhaps they were more motivated to take exception to the building code to achieve their convictions in practice. However, experiencing limits from legal requirements, particularly in terms of building practice, has been common for intentional communities. The Ohu communities of the 1970s had to meet building codes to keep government support, which clashed with the ideals of some of those who lived there (Sargisson & Sargent, 2004, p. 43). Hong and Vicdan state that the process of meeting planning regulations during eco-village establishment often means that "idealism surrenders to pragmatism" (2016, p. 132). However, in some locations, eco-villages have sought to change legal standards to suit their ideals. For example, Sieben Linden lobbied the German government to legally recognize their building methods (Litfin, 2014, p. 44). Therefore, influence can occur both ways.

Using new treated timber was a new problem that no one had mentioned being raised before. However, debate over recycled treated timber use had emerged earlier:

*Katherine:* We came across, in a skip that was going to the rubbish, an old set of stairs that were tanned timber. We thought, "Oh, we'll use that and stick

it on our cabin.” This was going to be burned, so we put it on our cabin, and thought, “We’ll use this for another twenty years, so it’s not put in to the atmosphere, and going to waste.”

*John:* It has been there for fifteen years now.

John and Katherine described this as a point where the community’s prevailing ideas around a specific ethical practice – having no treated timber – were challenged by the competing practice of recycling materials:

*John:* If it’s banned, we have to look at why it’s banned. If it’s because of production damage, and environmental costs, if you are recycling it you actually prevent those chemicals from being released prematurely into the environment. The damage in creating it has been done, you might as well let it live out its full life. You are not actually promoting its manufacture by reusing it.

Some members had previously taken a hard-line approach against this, which forced those intending to recycle treated timber to rethink their plans:

*Leon:* I had a lot of tanalised timber, all second-hand; I had to get rid of it. I wasn’t allowed to bring it here, despite the fact that our fenceposts here are tanalised timber anyway.<sup>25</sup> I had the choice of dumping it – I put signs out the front, ‘free timber’, but I could only get rid of a little bit. Then I had the choice of paying big money to have it dumped in the rubbish dump, which is not good, or burning it, which is even worse. But because I didn’t have much money, I burnt it – which really bothered me, but I didn’t know what to do with it. Now, people are buying new tanalised timber here to build stuff. So, things, you know... we’ve grown quite a bit, and changed... no doubt, we will keep doing that.

Leon had to work out a compromise, because to others, trying to recycle materials that were harmful was not as simple as he thought. Therefore, individual variation and community negotiation occurred in regards to ethical construction materials similarly to how they occurred for food production. Situations such as this illustrate how navigation of potential practice has taken place at both a community and individual level, and as Leon stated, will continue to occur.

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<sup>25</sup> There were some fence posts, as mentioned, that were clearly untreated.

## Conclusion

Through practice, eco-villagers had begun to establish eco-lifestyles. Residents sought to develop closer relationships with their natural environment, and live off it in a sustainable, self-sufficient way. Their land directly provided food, water and electricity, buildings were constructed in a way that minimised waste and environmental harm, and trade was sought within local social networks to lower consumption. Negative results of eco-villagers living on the land, particularly waste, were integrated with natural processes such as the nutrient cycle. These changes meant that eco-villagers progressed toward their overall ethical goal, a more ecologically responsible lifestyle than what consumer-capitalism promoted.

In many ways, these activities changed the environmental context that eco-villagers lived within, as they rejuvenated previously polluted land, and allowed eco-villagers to live off of it using sustainable practice. Societal change was being created too, as these alternative means of subsistence meant that residents contributed less to the consumer-capitalist orthodoxy they disagreed with, and local supply networks drew others into supporting and benefiting from Whakatipu's practices. Visitors, like myself and other WWOOFers, also played a part as we learned from these activities. This meant that wider change was occurring, and that there was progress within wider society toward making eco-lifestyles more possible, even if only in small ways.

However, not enough progress was made for all ideal practices to become easier. There were numerous challenges for residents in becoming self-sufficient along mutually accepted guidelines; there were also difficulties in obtaining materials, such as timber, that the community could agree were ethical. Individuals had to develop context-specific approaches for what they did, and the community had come to encompass these approaches, even if some felt they were detrimental to the community's purposes. In many of these situations, however, systemic limitations imposed by a consumer-capitalist orthodoxy were evidenced, and individualised approaches were the result of people trying to address these as they saw best fitting their own circumstances. In the following chapter, I discuss these limitations on ethical practice, how Whakatipu had mitigated internal tension between people that arose from the stress of their intentional lifestyle, and what this means for thinking about successful ethical living.

## 6 Navigating Ethical Limitations

In this chapter, I draw several key threads of discussion together. These are the central findings of this study, which not only show what Whakatipu's lifestyle development looked like, but also what it means to pursue an ethical eco-lifestyle against considerable odds. The first section focuses on the difficulties that eco-villagers described, and explores how, ultimately, Whakatipu's ideal lifestyle was not possible. The societal context that Whakatipu existed in posed numerous difficulties for achieving ideals, despite the change that eco-villagers sought to create there. Secondly, I sum up some reasons for, and results of, the individual variation in lifestyle development that has occurred within the community, as residents encountered and dealt with these challenges in their own unique ways. The third section is dedicated to exploring the subsequent habitus, or strategic way-of-being, that developed in Whakatipu. Building on Smith (2001) and Haluza-DeLay's (2008) adaptation of Bourdieu's concept of habitus, I describe how Whakatipu residents' way-of-being in the world acknowledged their relationship with overlapping contexts. While they sought a closer relationship with their environment, they also recognised the inescapable influence of the society they lived in. I also discuss the holistic and pragmatic strategies that eco-villagers developed to continue pursuing eco-living, and how these allowed them to navigate the limitations posed by consumer-capitalism.

### **Sustainability Is Not Possible**

As indicated in Chapter Five, eco-villagers had encountered various obstacles to achieving their ideal lifestyle. They were not in denial about this, and were quick to tell me that what they had initially set out to achieve, sustainable self-sufficiency, was not possible. There were numerous practices that eco-villagers felt they did not have the ability to change:

*Beth:* We have to use our van! We don't commute daily, we go up and camp there, but we have to come back in the weekends to check on the goats and things... it isn't the most efficient vehicle.

*Harry:* We're benchmarkers... Carbon emissions, and carbon footprint. We're nowhere near sustainable. We're living an extreme lifestyle, and we're nowhere near sustainable!

*Gerrald:* Sustainable living is not possible. Not here, in the village... Totally sustainable, you never will – for me, that is a dream. Maybe you could do it, but then you have to go fifty or a hundred years back in your steps.

*Diane:* We're certainly envisaging that we'll be growing much of our own food. But there's stuff like petrol (laughs). I mean, one of the things here, for instance, is it's quite difficult to bicycle into town.

Residents had needs they could not meet self-sufficiently, and their standard of living would drop if they went without these. While eco-villagers still found benefits in holding onto their ideals and pursuing them, these unmet needs signified contextual limitations. Most residents, therefore, realised their desired lifestyle would never be fully complete. If eco-villagers wanted to maintain a modern standard of living, and remain connected to the outside world, they had to continue unsustainable activity. Transport was a clear example, as eco-villagers could not produce petrol, nor do without fossil-fuel transport. As Gerrald stated with his comment about going “a hundred years back”, the question was whether in pursuit of ecological sustainability, residents should construct lives that completely disregarded the societal context that shaped them. In an early community argument over ‘correct’ practice, a hard-line member was told they should just live in a cave, because that was seen as the kind of life they were trying to establish. The member replied that if they could live in a cave, they would. They did not, however, live in a cave when I met them, and referred to the importance of pragmatism in determining what practices to change. A community member in Jenkin’s study had very similar reflections, that to actually achieve the ecological ideal would mean returning to peasantry:

People at Tui are quite outward looking. There's a lot of interaction with the outside world, a lot of travel, and it's pretty hard to have that and be self-sufficient. You've got to go into peasant-mode, so to speak, and do everything yourself. (2011, p. 45)

There were other instances where residents required day-to-day consumption enabled by consumer-capitalism. For many, undertaking some everyday tasks without unsustainable aids proved too difficult:

*Gerrald:* I would have to mow my grass by hand, with the big scythe, all these things. With that, I said, “No, there I feel, I will not do it.” On my land, where

I have so much lawn, I cannot. Also, I know Erich tried it for many years, but he now has a mower. Now, you need machines, you cannot do it all by hand.

In the long run, activities like scythe-cutting grass were not worth the time or effort. Similarly, both Katherine and Gerrald mentioned that ideally, they would keep their own cows for milk, but this was too much work for individual households, and too difficult to co-ordinate communally. Instead, residents bought milk from a local organic producer, another provision that required an income. Their gardens were not always able to provide adequate food:

*Gerrald:* Sometimes, like in winter, in a special season one year, some crops are good, and the others not so good. Then you have to buy some things.

To go without these amenities – driving, food purchasing, and other needs such as clothing – meant going against the sustenance of self. However, continuing to support *these* aspects of sustained human life worked *against* sustaining the environment; participation in mainstream consumer-capitalism was required to continue developing a lifestyle separate to consumer-capitalism. This shaped an emphasis on pragmatism, an understanding of compromise, throughout Whakatipu, as this chapter shows. Overall, however, this illustrates the difficulties in fully achieving a completely ethical way of life with only individual and small-scale communal action.

The inability of intentional communities to completely achieve self-sufficient, sustainable lifestyles, for many reasons, has been documented in other research (Hong & Vicdan, 2016, p. 129). Intentional communities often experience this, and while they may continue to function, “...are much more reserved in their hopes and [abandon] many of the practices which they initially believed were essential to their gentle revolution” (Webb, 1999, p. 45). There were specific areas where Whakatipu residents came across limitations, which I presently discuss.

### **Challenges with Personal Change**

At times, residents discussed how the consumer-capitalist practice of wider society still influenced their actions and desires, and provided easier alternatives to what they felt were more ethical actions:

*Maria:* I know this is probably against all the principles, but I just can't bring myself to eat... From what I can gather, you're not supposed to eat your laying chooks. And I just can't, I'll go and get one of those hormone-filled

ones (laughs). I don't do that often. But, you know, I just can't bring myself... I can eat the meat off the village, probably because I don't know the cow personally (laughs).

*Gerrald:* I baked my bread, but that is a lot of work – it has to rise three times, and you have to work it again... That is a lot of time, every three or four days. Then the Italian bakery arrived in town, and they had such good bread, exactly what I like. I thought “I have so many other things to do... I'll buy this bread.” I believe everyone could do a little more, but totally self-sufficient? It's not possible.

At times, other residents mentioned similar practices from earlier in their lives, such as spraying weeds, that they still sometimes felt tempted to do. One eco-villager described how they felt that the inclination towards such practices was a ‘real challenge’; the enormous effort which some ecological alternatives required of residents contributed to this dilemma. Circumstances could change and make such choices easier, but at times obligations (such as having to work at a job) meant that other actions were taken. As Gerrald described, if there was an option that he could live with, and did not require disproportionate amounts of work, the choice would be shaped differently.

Kurt described the way he thought such preferences developed earlier in his life:

Living in the city, we didn't have a car. Not everybody had a car then. You took the bus to town, or rode a bike, that sort of thing. Then, at a certain moment, my father earnt enough to buy a car... So, way after the war, it must have been the 1960s, or something... at a certain moment, I thought, “How could we have ever done without a car?” Because, all these things you do need a car. But, I'd never missed it before! Because I didn't have a notion. That's an interesting sort of thing, you know?

These were the kind of default tendencies toward relying on consumer-capitalism that residents sought to address through their lifestyle pursuit in Whakatipu, and some were clearly easier to eliminate than others. There is a challenge, however, in reworking aspects of lifestyle that have become ‘natural’ or default (in Bourdieu's



terms, part of habitus) even though they see these practices as unsustainable. The process of developing these tendencies ‘by default’ is what Kurt describes here.

Other researchers have described how coming to see this reality is a common experience for intentional communities, and requires them to rethink their approach:

More interesting is to observe and explicate how individual residents make sense of their lives, which must be sustainable in all aspects – especially when they realize such a permanent task requires constant redefinition of their lifestyles within the innovative social setting. The research reveals paradoxes prevalent in residents' consumption practices, relationship management, and politics toward various external forces. (Hong & Vicdan, 2016, p. 125)

Once again, these paradoxes are something that Whakatipu residents were well acquainted with, and they remain paradoxes: for some actions, it seemed there were no sustainable alternatives to particular established, often habitual practices, or for specific tastes or preferences. The constant redefinition that Hong and Vicdan (2016) refer to here reflects many aspects explored in this thesis, such as social interactions, understanding of how context shapes actions and actions shape context, and maintaining community identity when everyone defines their ethics differently. Constant redefinition came to characterise the meta-narrative of life in Whakatipu.

### **Legal Limitations**

A very clear contextual limitation, which began to emerge in Chapter Five in relation to building, is the legal system. There are legal regulations around selling home-grown food products:

*Rose:* The government is all about sustaining corporate things.

*Logan:* They are changing slowly, but the will's not really there. It's so difficult for the small producer to maintain all the [regulations].

*Katherine:* You hear that Monsanto is trying to, for instance, control our ability to save seeds – things that people have been doing for thousands of years. That's always in the background – not that we would take any notice of it (laughs), because we see saving seeds as our fundamental right. But, in terms of animals, it is a pity that some people have abused the system and killed animals on the farm with no hygiene and no regulation, but the government goes too far. Because now, we'd like to use our organic, home-

killed-by-a-butcher animals in the café – where we know their whole history, as individual animals. But it's totally illegal, which is such a pity.

Many residents obtained raw milk through a local producer, which enabled independence from corporate dairy farming. However, this supply had recently been threatened due to changes in the law, throwing its future availability into doubt:

*Katherine:* The government wanted to stamp down on people who were selling raw milk. But, there were a lot of submissions – so the government finds another way, by making it so difficult for the people who are actually producing the raw milk.

John also referred to limitations emerging for independent building projects:

The whole owner-builder concept, they're trying to remove that. There are ways around it, but it's difficult, and they are trying to close those doors. That's a real pity, because you couldn't get builders to build a house like this. You couldn't afford it, and people that could afford it wouldn't build a house like this anyway. If you were to remove, or make the legislation so tight that you can no longer do this, then that's a loss to society... I think it's pretty obvious, it's all about profits, and that society operates how they want it to operate.

Eco-villagers did not feel that the law was *totally* against the development of eco-lifestyles. While I was in Whakatipu, some residents were consulting with a legal expert on becoming an incorporated society, a legal process they thought might be helpful to protect what they were doing. However, in terms of what could be practiced, some residents felt that their freedom for sustainable practices, such as seed saving, was legally threatened. Other eco-villagers felt that the route to ecological living put forward by the community, such as using untreated timber, was not something they felt safe doing within a legal context.

As illustrated here, some residents also perceived that capitalist ideals, particularly the neo-liberal protection of corporate rights, could affect their ability to do what they wanted. While the consumer-capitalist context which I outline in Chapter Three may not seem to be responsible for the legal limitations discussed here, laws reinforce a status quo that prioritises consumer-capitalist activities. Both timber and milk are good examples of this. The law does not necessarily stop people from

acquiring and using raw milk, or untreated timber, if they are determined to do so. Rather, they establish a norm of *which* timber and milk can be most easily acquired, and how they can be used without fear of state reprisal. This is therefore an influence over the ease with which specific alternative practices can be undertaken, and whether or not eco-villagers feel safe in doing so.

### **Efforts at Changing Contexts**

In exploring how eco-lifestyle development in Whakatipu was limited, and the way that personal and legal challenges contributed to this, the relationship between context and individual became clearer. As described throughout Chapters 4 and 5, residents sought to change the context of their immediate environment and social community, the way in which they obtained their subsistence, and for some, the practices of wider society. Residents also sought to change themselves, particularly in shifting their lifestyle away from one influenced so heavily by consumer-capitalism. The types of change sought were therefore multifaceted and intertwined. For some, the end goal of their efforts was to create, in wider society, the same thing that they were trying to create on their own peninsula: a human presence on the earth that did not damage nature. Even if some residents did not want this on a wider scale, pro-environmental change within their environmental or societal context would help in the further development of their eco-lifestyle. Some change was created, and thus, their actions had influenced the world around them. The contribution to localized, decentralised supply networks and environmental improvement changed their immediate living situation, and to some extent, they had drawn other people beyond the village into interaction with their lifestyles and ideals. Therefore, even if there was not a wider uptake of activity, some change was achieved.

However, completely developing self-sufficient, alternative lifestyles was ultimately limited by what was actually made possible by the environment and society, meaning that the level to which residents could affect contextual change to better support their lifestyles was also limited. Erich discussed how he thought more change would be possible, but it had not occurred:

In the 1960s, being a university student, I thought we're going to, very quickly, revolutionise the whole system which is wrecking the planet. It's not going to take very long, because everybody will see what it does, that it's no good, and you can do things a lot better. That obviously hasn't happened, and

I've come now to believe that the only area where I have a real influence is myself.

Whakatipu remained only a small group of individuals intentionally pursuing alternative lifestyles within a society that still predominantly operated in accordance with consumer-capitalism. As such, Whakatipu residents could not completely create lives separate from consumer-capitalism. They were simultaneously engaged in contributing to this status quo out of a need for survival, and attempting to create their new, changed world. This parallels Brown's (2002a, p. 174) argument that intentional communities must remain economically tied to the mainstream to survive, even if they do not want to contribute to it, or be reliant on it.

It therefore remains to be seen whether Baker's (2013, p. 295) argument that eco-villages can 'ignore capitalism to death' holds true. Ignoring capitalism to death is not a passive activity, but rather necessitates trying to create a societal shift so that consumer-capitalism is no longer required. The activities undertaken by Whakatipu toward localised self-sufficiency potentially contribute to this. Quoting Holloway, Baker states, "the assertion of self-determination", that is, the pursuit of self-sufficiency, "necessarily means moving against capitalism" (2013, p. 297). Whakatipu, however, has not achieved this to the extent that they are actually ignoring capitalism, because their effort to create an alternative to capitalism necessarily relies on capitalism. At this point, the full effect of societal context on ethical action is evident, and we are left to decide whether such paradoxical compromise should be called 'failure.'

## **Individual Variation and Individual Focus**

As indicated throughout this study, there was a great deal of individual variation in how eco-lifestyles were pursued. It was evident when exploring some of these variations, such as the different prioritisations of off-grid power, that people's own motivations had formed differently, or in the instance of whether societal change was valued, that there were different desired outcomes. However, given the paradox of attempting to create lifestyles that were not completely possible, it is also understandable that individuals dealt with these complexities in many different ways. As individuals arrived at different understandings of what change was possible when confronted with limits, and different lengths they were willing and able to go to, they

made different assessments and acted on them. Sometimes, these were at odds with others in the community. These were not easy decisions to make, because members had invested their entire lives in this eco-lifestyle pursuit. When push came to shove, residents made decisions that worked best for their own beliefs and circumstances.

To some extent, Whakatipu's conflicts<sup>26</sup> resulted from these individualised responses to contextual challenges, and the ways these were negotiated within a community setting. Residents also had personality differences and a close-living village situation that contributed to conflict, particularly as arguments between some people remained unresolved over the years. However, residents did not always consider the ways in which societal limits also created personal difference, and were interpreted by people differently, during their disagreements. Philippa stated that she tried to accept different approaches, but that this was difficult when making decisions that affected the whole community:

You can maintain the position that you are right, and everybody else is wrong, or you can say, "This is what I believe is better for us," and see what the others think. I think that is different – it's not, "I'm right and you are all wrong," yeah? Accepting it. And it's not easy, no!

Others in Whakatipu had arrived at similar 'agree to disagree' conclusions, however the history of debate had left its mark on relationships, and some people only talked to each other at community meetings, when they could not avoid it. Baker suggests that the pressure of working against the status quo produces conflict within eco-villages:

The point is not to go to the [...] extreme and assume that the wider context is fully to blame for these internal rifts, but rather to take account of and acknowledge the often significant impact wider dynamics have upon the inner workings of ecovillages [...] Recognizing this impact can [...] help prevent an escalation of the internal blame game that can easily spiral out of control within a community. (2013, pp. 296-297)

As Baker says, while the wider context is not the only thing creating individual variation and conflict, it is an integral part.

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<sup>26</sup> I have not greatly elaborated on specific instances of conflict because a lot of it was historical, and lived on only in individual exchanges, meetings, and household discussion. However, residents had left because of it. The grid power debate was heated, as were others over building materials and lifestyle ideologies. The timber debate looked as though it could flare into a similar conflict.

Some residents believed that the community should be united in their response to these challenges, in part because of the desire for wider influence, but others disagreed with the lifestyle this would entail. This can be seen in the use of treated timber by a resident, and how others in the community responded to this. Lack of unity meant that some eco-villagers felt another limitation for the kind of change the community could create. Once again, for eco-villagers who desired to create greater change within the world, and inspire others to live ecologically, this was a weighty problem. It appeared as if their lifelong investment was being threatened by the actions of others. Therefore, one negative consequence of individual variation, for some residents, was that it stymied the presentation of a consistent alternative practice they believed could encourage other people to pursue eco-lifestyles.

Variation also contributed to struggles for achieving an egalitarian community with consensus decision-making processes, as individuals came to see their situations very differently. The desire for self-sufficiency, creating change, and the constant battle against limitations has been noted as contributing to community breakdown:

Metcalf suggests that one of the reasons why communities become less communal is because they fail to live up to their original ideals [...] While the idealism that motivated many founding groups included a desire to address social inequalities, and foster a sense of collective endeavour and enterprise, founding members were (and are), frequently headstrong, opinionated and highly individualistic. (Jones, 2011, p. 208)

The eco-village of Sieben Linden in Germany has separate neighbourhoods for members with different priorities, such as veganism or energy independence, which allows them to cluster together and maintain communal lifestyles (Dawson, 2006, p. 30). While this is a potential solution to problems posed by individuality, it would be harder to achieve in a smaller community, and does not actually address why individual ethical approaches develop.

Individual variations were inevitable in Whakatipu as idealism encountered reality. Residents made many adjustments in personal belief and communal organisation to manage this and keep Whakatipu together; as Leon said, “we’ve grown quite a bit, and changed... no doubt, we will keep doing that.” In this way, eco-lifestyles continued developing in a way where individuals’ attempts at creating change were influenced by an understanding of their relationship to their contexts.

## **Ethical Progress**

The community of Whakatipu continued to function, despite the unachievable nature of their goals, the individualisation of their practice, and the resulting tension. What enabled eco-villagers to keep pursuing their ideals was the habitus that had developed over the course of their eco-lifestyle pursuit. As outlined in Chapter Three, habitus describes a naturalised way of being in the world, or how people go about their lives. It encompasses peoples' actions, and helps direct a person toward their goals within a specific context. Bourdieu, and other theorists who also deploy this concept, generally refer to this as a subconscious, "pre-logic[al]" orientation. However, as Haluza-DeLay states, when people are intentionally developing a lifestyle, increased reflexivity may bring elements of habitus to light (2008, p. 214). Whakatipu residents generally discussed *arriving* at the conclusions that I present here, that they emerged in the process of pursuing other goals. In this sense, the habitus was not entirely intentionally sought or cultivated, but rather elements of it became apparent throughout the experiences that eco-villagers had.

## **Reconnecting with the Environment**

Central to habitus in Whakatipu was how residents had shifted to conduct their lives as integrated within their immediate, natural environment. This is evident throughout the discussion of practice in Chapter Five; eco-villagers had, for the most part, developed a greater understanding that their environment's provisions – food, water, electricity, and timber – were limited, interrelated, and supporting their lives. Residents had learnt how to integrate themselves into their environment and harness natural processes, such as the nutrient cycle, to maintain the health of their land while drawing sustenance from it. Attempts to create decentralised supply systems also indicated a growing orientation toward their local region's social and production networks. While these systems did not completely provide for eco-villagers, the fact that they sought any increased reliance on them at all showed an ethical drive toward environmental integration for the sake of sustainability. Permaculture was integral in providing practical knowledge of how to do this, but also informed residents that their lives *could* be environmentally integrated. This recalls Haluza-DeLay and Berezan's argument that permaculture provides a 'different game to be played', establishing that there are ways for people to intentionally orientate their lives (2013, p. 143).



While this greater connection was sought intentionally and informed by permaculture, it was the experienced process of trying to develop this lifestyle that had actually made it ‘real’, or even feasible, to eco-villagers. They did not start out with complete knowledge, or even a collective understanding, of what they were about to undertake. The lived connection to their environment had to be wrought from the experience of developing new practices. Specific environmental features and geographic particularities, such as excessive rain, had to be learned about and adapted to. Similarly, constructing decentralized supply networks meant fostering knowledge of where one’s subsistence came from, and how this could be changed. Katherine demonstrated how important this was to her when she discussed knowing her cows as individual animals with whole histories. It was this integration with the living systems of their environment, and concern for its wellbeing, that emerged from the change that residents had sought on their land, in their localized subsistence, and their personal attitudes. In a sense, eco-villagers who sought to inspire societal change desired that others would also see their relationship with their environment in this way, through intentionally increasing their self-sufficient reliance on it. This specific orientation toward environmental integration, and the local environmental change that it produced, was the end result of developing an ecological life.

This environmental relationship is actually what made any eco-lifestyle possible at all. However, knowing how best to approach life within an environment involves understanding how the society surrounding that environment affects, or limits, practice. Overall, the changes desired as an outworking of ethical conviction were not completely possible due to societal context, as some consumer-capitalist practices were still required. Therefore, knowing how to live well within their environment meant that eco-villagers also understood that they had to play by the rules of consumer-capitalism to some degree. Negotiating the pushes and pulls within these contexts – integration with environment and ecological wellbeing, and the economic necessity of consumer-capitalist practice – produced two key strategies which eco-villagers discussed. These strategies shaped decisions about what actions would help residents progress toward achieving their ideals over the long-term.

### **Holistic Strategies**

Philippa asked how I defined sustainability (while she instructed me on how to get creases out of linen without ironing) when I first arrived to stay with her and

Erich. I didn't really have an answer, because what I thought sustainability was, at that point, was quite different to the interaction between ideals and lived reality that I had been witnessing in Whakatipu. I felt that whatever I said would sound hopelessly naïve. Philippa and Erich went on to describe holism as a central guiding strategy, something that brought perspective to why unethical practice had to be continued, and how to think about this. Other residents referred to holistic principles as they discussed how past experiences had shown them the need for balance in sustainability and self-sufficiency. They felt that the health of the environment could not come at the cost of their own health, or the social wellbeing of the community. As discussed in Chapter One, other eco-villages also emphasise holistic sustainability, however the way it was mobilized in Whakatipu included consideration of how there were requirements imposed by society that could not be ignored.

While various residents referred to sustainability as encompassing every aspect of life, Erich and Philippa presented it to me in a direct way:

*Erich:* It's [sustainability] something that can carry on indefinitely, and if you break it down, you can say that there is an ecological component to it, an economic component to it, a social component to it. So, it comes into play in our entire lives. It's not just something that's to do with gardening, or house building, or work and money, or relationships – it's all of that.

Holism had been outlined in the community agreements, which state eco-villagers "Will create fertile, holistically integrated agricultural systems, and a village culture that abundantly provides our community's needs for healthy living at all levels: physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual." Erich expanded on these by stating how, through experience, he discovered these components had to be balanced for an explicitly ecologically focused lifestyle to work. Earlier in life, Erich had been more purist about what ecological living meant, but found he had to adapt. Balance involved tension, for example, the continual requirement of income may necessitate ecological compromise. Both Erich and Philippa argued that maintaining balance meant considering the effects of actions throughout multiple areas, and across time:

*Erich:* If I consider the long-term effect of what I'm doing, on a time scale, a geographic scale, and on a social scale, and I get to the conclusion, "Yes, that doesn't have any negative impact, long-term, globally," then, I can say, "Yes, that's a sustainable practice, or a sustainable thing to do." If it falls short of

any of those, then it may be less unsustainable, in the sense of an improvement of something we used to do, but truly sustainable is a very hard yardstick, if you approach it that way.

*Philippa:* I like that principle that the American Indians used – “Consider in everything you do, how it will impact the next seven generations.” That is a very good aspect. Ecological, economical, social, emotional, spiritual, that’s all part of it. We need to reconnect these things, I think. We’ve been coming through an age where everything has been looked at as just mechanical – there’s that part, and that part... Human kind assumes they know how each part functions, and I don’t deny that we have learned a lot. But there’s a lot of stuff we don’t know. The interplay of all these things has been definitely neglected. What does it mean if you don’t think further ahead than three years, which is what the current government in New Zealand does, because that’s their election time... You just go, “Hello, anybody home?” They don’t dare think outside those parameters.

Erich and Philippa outlined a holistic strategy as one of awareness, balance, and longevity. This meant that while living with awareness of environmental health was still the goal, they also considered the longevity of their own lives, and how to economically sustain themselves.

This holistic approach was reflected in the experiences of other residents, who had to learn about balancing ideals:

*Gerrald:* At the beginning, I heard many times, ‘Community first.’ I never came clear with that. But if I’m somewhere new, I don’t have a big mouth, so I was a little quiet, but also a little shocked. Then when I talked about it, most people said “At first community, then the family.” I mean, I have to put my family first, because, only if I am happy inside, with my family, then I can give. Community here means to give. But if I have trouble at home, and am angry, about this and that, with my wife, with other people, how I can I give then? How can I be open?

Gerrald had to learn to balance the communal component of ethical practice with his family’s needs. John mentioned something similar, due to the experiences he and Katherine had with bringing a young family to Whakatipu. There is an inherent

tension here that has been observed in other intentional communities. Webb, citing Kanter (1999, p. 49) for example states, “communalism and familialism are antagonistic principles ... there is an inverse relationship between strength of community and strength of family.” This is also an example of how holism emphasises different needs for different people. Exploring differences from a holistic perspective, however, showed the need for pragmatic social compromise, in order to sustain the community.

### **Pragmatic Strategies**

Encountering limitations on developing ethical practice led to pragmatic consideration of which practices should be attempted, and what compromises should be made within the community. Eco-villagers were quick to discuss how ecological ideals must be grounded in realistic practice. I got the feeling that this principle was often explained to adjust visitors’ expectations (like my own) of what an eco-lifestyle looks like:

*Katherine:* Sustainability is a very loaded word, and people look at it quite differently. You get a whole range of people within the eco-village. To some people, the question is absolutely black and white – this is good, that is bad, there’s nothing in between, and very staunch about it. We tend to look at things as shades of grey. There are things that are better, and things that are worse.

*Leon:* [When I had asked how he determines what is sustainable] There’s no answer to that, it’s not black and white, it’s only shades of grey. We ended up coming to that conclusion here as a group.

While some residents were more “black and white”, pragmatism had become a principle for many. This has been employed in numerous areas, including interpersonal relationships, debate about correct practice, and the acceptance of maintaining employment. Leon’s statement illustrates that pragmatism did not initially factor amongst the community; this was something that eco-villagers had to arrive at. The exchange discussed earlier about ‘living in a cave’ demonstrates this. Pragmatism did not mean giving up on ideals, but did require tolerance of less desirable practice for indefinite amounts of time. This distinction is key, because surviving while pursuing holistic practice sometimes meant undertaking less-than-

ideal actions. Tension obviously existed between these elements, and at times pragmatic practice had to favour economic priorities over ecological ones, even if people had stronger ethical convictions for ecological practices. Like applications of holism, this changed with individual circumstances, and what limitations were encountered. As ideals were still in place throughout pragmatic decision-making, residents continued to develop their eco-lifestyles.

Discovering the need to ‘agree to disagree’ was an enormous influence on the development of pragmatism, and an area where compromise was subsequently employed. Katherine’s previous quote hinted that conflict had also arisen at times between those who were willing to see things in a more pragmatic way, and those who had stricter ideas about ethical practice. Overall, most residents held to *some* ideals that others did not, and therefore pragmatism played a part for almost all of them. Conflict resolution was aided by the ability to see why compromise arose for different eco-villagers. Some members employed this consideration with the individual who had used new treated timber, in an instance that showed they recognised the individual had encountered legal limitations, and this may be a compromise they all had to communally accept.

### **Never-Ending Individual Journeys**

The strategies described here allowed individual residents to undertake their own lifestyle pursuits within a larger community. People evaluated opportunities to create further change, and sometimes took them, according to what would best enable their eco-lifestyle pursuit to continue.

I saw this play out in an event experienced by John. During my first trip, he had a job at a hospital in the nearest city. This was a 12-hour long shift once a week, and he said that while he didn’t enjoy it, the supplementary income for him and Katherine was helpful. During my second period of fieldwork, he told me he had resigned. He said although this would make money tighter, it could be a positive push for them to invest more time and effort in their property’s production, and finish some projects. This instance showed a moment where a connection to mainstream provision that had been maintained out of pragmatism was cut, and self-sufficient practice would be forced to increase. This clearly entailed risk, as some of the support that had made life possible would be gone; simultaneously, there was understanding that this would allow more ethical practice to be developed. It would also mean he could spend

more time with his family, and would be consuming less petrol. It did not signal the end of all limitations, but rather the ability to move past some.

Such moments of navigation, informed by habitus and with an overall direction toward further ecological living, could occur for anybody, and had clearly occurred previously, as events that established strategies also took place. The knowledge that necessary actions could shift between ethical and less ethical modes – as Logan put it at one point, “A step forward, a step back” – is what allowed residents to continue developing eco-lifestyles despite ever present limitations. To appropriate one of Gerrald’s statements, everyone, at some point, will be able to do “a little more,” even if they will never reach their ideal completely.

Not only does this resonate with Smith’s (2001) proposal of a fluid, contextual way of thinking about ethical living, but it connects with the way in which other studies have considered how eco-villages can create change. It is not about overall success, or even success or failure in certain actions, but rather the direction of lifestyle development, and how this progressively shows that ethical alternative lifestyles are pursuable. Expanding on Holloway, Baker argues that this defines the process of eco-villages creating alternatives to capitalism:

This process can never be complete: “The world is full of fissures ... [and] cracks in capitalist domination” (2005a: 220) [...] Yet while these fissures and cracks in the capitalist façade are always “contradictory because they are rooted in the antagonisms of capitalist society” and thus “easy to criticize, easy to make fun of,” what is important to note is “not their present limitations but the direction of their movement” (Holloway 2005a: 220). And this movement is the movement of, or drive toward, self-determination. (Baker, 2013, p. 297)

The lifestyles that eco-villagers pursue will never be complete but are instead a perpetual “process, and not a finished product” (Kaspar, 2008, p. 20). Hong and Vicdan similarly describe this as “an emergent, negotiated, communal, and inconsequential mode of being” (2016, p. 129). These lives demonstrate that the development of ethical living is not clear-cut, but rather a constant process of social and contextual negotiation.

## Conclusion

Despite all the changes that eco-villagers were able to make in their own lives, and in their local environment, they had not completely succeeded in creating their ideal eco-lifestyle. While their actions contributed to local change, and have had some influence beyond the community, they continued to live within a wider society that is shaped by consumer-capitalism, which made involvement in consumer-capitalism unavoidable. While they questioned this orthodoxy, they were unable to overcome it. The ecological practices that residents developed meant that they did have new ways to survive with *lessened* reliance on consumer-capitalism. This was an instance where their immediate environment had changed, but not enough for eco-villagers to completely leave consumer-capitalism behind. To cope with the tension of being reliant on consumer-capitalism while critiquing it, individual residents made strategic choices about what to compromise on. These compromises differed according to individual circumstances, even within the village, and as such, efforts had been made to negotiate these differences and keep the community together.

Rather than accepting defeat due to these limitations, eco-villagers sought to continue progressing toward an ideal eco-lifestyle. They did this through habitus: living in a way that acknowledged the opportunities and limitations of their overlapping contexts, and assessing practice through holistic and pragmatic strategies. Intentionally living with an awareness of context meant that eco-villagers sought to integrate themselves within their immediate environment, but also that they acknowledged the influence of consumer-capitalism there, and the need to remain involved with it. However, using holistic and pragmatic strategies, they were able to assess where compromises would ultimately aid their individual lifestyle development. At times, this meant that residents could leave behind activities they disagreed with, and achieve further progress toward an ideal. In the meantime, compromise in practice and decision-making was necessary for a balanced pursuit of ecological living.



# Conclusions

My thesis explored several questions, fuelled by my desire for a lifestyle that matched my environmental ideals. I wanted to know how Whakatipu's residents had developed their ecological practice, what their experiences of doing so were, what challenges they had encountered, and whether they were able to achieve their ideal eco-lifestyle. Through this, I hoped that they could teach me, and others, about developing eco-lifestyles, and how to overcome obstacles for doing so. Many of the practices in Whakatipu were inspiring, in terms of what people can actually do. However, as eco-villagers described the challenges and limitations they had encountered, it became evident that eco-lifestyles are more complex than simply undertaking 'correct' practice, or considering it failure or dissonance if this is not possible. Here, I discuss the conclusions to my research: what I learned through exploring Whakatipu's experience, and how this led to wider consideration of ethical practice as a fluid, paradoxical navigation within complex overlapping contexts.

## **The Experience of Whakatipu**

Those in Whakatipu had similar experiences to those in other eco-villages, and earlier intentional communities. Residents were motivated to live in Whakatipu by influences throughout their lives, and their desire to create change in various ways was a tacit connection to the societal critique expressed by previous intentional communities. Some residents had experienced such earlier communities, and brought that heritage with them to Whakatipu. Similarly, the incorporation of permaculture into the community's practice is shared with many eco-villages around the world. Permaculture training, alongside the financial capacity to create an eco-village, enabled eco-villagers to pursue this particular lifestyle.

This eco-lifestyle pursuit had resulted in eco-villagers developing numerous practices as alternatives to consumer-capitalism, an orthodox ideology in their wider societal field that many of them took issue with. Informed by permaculture, residents undertook gardening, the produce from which replaced the need for some provisions from consumer-capitalist systems. Similarly, building and infrastructure in Whakatipu provided alternative sources of electricity and heat, and subverted norms around conventional building, which residents felt neglected efficiency and longevity. These practices created a close, integrated relationship between residents and their land, and

formed decentralized, local supply networks to replace some of the mainstream provision they previously needed. Sewerage and other biological waste was composted, and used to develop closed nutrient cycles. Eco-villagers felt that these actions increased the self-sufficiency and sustainability of their lives, and decreased their reliance on consumer-capitalist provision. These practices shaped Whakatipu's environment in a way that reflected the world many residents desired to see on a larger scale, and made further development of ecological practice easier.

Developing an eco-lifestyle presented many challenges. Interpersonal conflict, similar to that discussed in studies by Webb (1999), Sargisson (2004), Sargisson and Sargent (2004), and Jones (2011) was present in Whakatipu, and became apparent in consensus decision-making. The challenges faced by individuals as they ran into difficulty when pursuing their ideals often contributed to this conflict. Differing approaches to resolving these dilemmas, involving issues such as timber usage, electrical grid connections, and meat eating, illustrated the role of individual circumstance and inclination – the intertwining influence of disposition, and enabling of capacity – in determining what practices appeared possible. For residents who desired that the community display a consistent lifestyle to wider society, some practices made them feel as though Whakatipu's philosophies had been undermined.

Ultimately, these challenges were evidence of the wider limitations on achieving the practice that many eco-villagers pursued. Residents had numerous needs that could not be met outside of consumer-capitalism. A clear paradox was thus present in the fact that continued involvement in consumer-capitalism was needed for eco-villagers to continue pursuing eco-lifestyles, which reflects the degree to which consumer-capitalism influenced the society that eco-villagers lived within. While residents had managed to change the field of their immediate environment, they had not been able to change the economic realities of this society. Some discussed how living within consumer-capitalist society had created mindsets that they sometimes struggled to break free from. They had also encountered legal barriers, which kept them engaged in mainstream practices that they wanted to create alternatives to. These limitations were clearly juxtaposed with ideal practice, and the ideal world that eco-villagers wanted to create. As such, there was tension around personal action, and perceptions of the practice of others. Despite these challenges, residents continued to

pursue a life that was not completely achievable, but that they could get closer to as they navigated between ideals and possibilities in the practice they undertook.

### **What is Possible?**

Pursuing ecological ethical practice can change the world, physically and socially, to make further ecological living more possible. The change that Whakatipu residents achieved on their land, and the influence they had begun to have beyond their community, demonstrates this. However, this practice could not change how society worked to the extent that eco-lifestyles could become completely possible. Eco-villagers had to remain active in consumer-capitalism. It appeared that as long as the majority continue consumer-capitalist practice, and there is not systemic reform, lifestyles completely alternative to consumer-capitalism cannot exist.

This does not mean that Whakatipu's efforts were in vain. Through their striving toward ecological living, informed by permaculture's vision of an alternative way of life, eco-villagers had created an integrated human-environment relationship, something that many theorists have argued is central to living more sustainably (Smith, 2001; Haluza-DeLay, 2008; Scoville, 2016). This, as stated, had brought about personal, environmental and social change. However, in their initial vision, residents had overestimated what they could achieve by establishing Whakatipu. Practices that would have extended the capacity for self-sufficiency and created further change, such as establishing community businesses, were not achieved. Similarly, some residents discovered their plans for self-sufficiency were unrealistic due to the effort required, and difficulty that it would impose on their lives (due to a loss of comfort, or legal risk). This reality should not dissuade people from attempting to develop eco-lifestyles. But it does require reassessment of whether, in the world we currently live in, we can ever completely achieve ideal lifestyles through individual effort, and how we should perceive such circumstances.

Rather than simply considering Whakatipu's actions as success or failure, we can consider how residents individually maintained ethical progress, by navigating practices depending on what would further their eco-lifestyle the most. While debate continued over how ethically correct some actions were, there was an overall acceptance that practice in-and-of-itself did not solely define ethical living. Through acknowledging limitations on practice, individuals considered their circumstances (including their dispositions and capacities) and what actions would sustain lifestyle

development in the long-term. Overarching ideals remained intact, because further progress could be possible later. Residents used such holistic and pragmatic strategies to consider whether various ecological practices would actually be wise to pursue.

As discussed in Chapter Three, Smith argues that ethical assessment focused on success and failure is the product of Western society's emphasis on rules and laws (2001, p. 202). This approach overlooks individual circumstances, and creates a homogenous view of ethical living, rather than acknowledging subjective differences. It also ignores contextual limitations on individuals achieving their ideals, and therefore promotes the idea that people simply fail to meet their own standards. This leads to an understanding of ethical failure as something that individuals bear all responsible for – why else would people not act according to their stated values? Reality is far more complex. Smith (2001) suggests *habitus* – context-aware strategies for creating a way of life – as a fluid approach that acknowledges subjectivity and contextual limitations, and characterises ethical living as progress, rather than existing in singular actions. This resonates with what occurred in Whakatipu, as the *habitus* of eco-villagers allowed them to continue holding ethical perspectives even if they could not be met. Such a *habitus* mitigates the tension of holding unachievable ideals by acknowledging contextual limitations, and shifting the focus from practice-in-and-of-itself to holistic and pragmatic navigation toward progress. Therefore, changes in both lifestyle and context are possible, in moments where context and personal orientation allow; these moments can be continually looked for, and navigated towards.

### **Changing the Approach to Ethical Practice**

As outlined in Chapter One, recent research into pro-environmental behaviour discursively presents the value-action gap as evidence of individual fault, and the only correct course of action as simply changing consumption practices. Carrington et al. (2016), among others, challenges this discourse, arguing that it ignores contextual, systemic limitations on practice. Whakatipu's experience showed that practice can happen outside of consumerism, and that some actions can actually reduce involvement in consumer-capitalism. Therefore, consumer activity is not the sole site of potential ethical action. Whakatipu also demonstrated another element of Carrington et al.'s (2016) critique, that in the pursuit of ethical lifestyles, many limitations were in some way connected to consumer-capitalism. Options around timber and electricity were restricted, and eco-villagers struggled to find ethical

practices here. The entire project of Whakatipu also began with the paradox that consumer-capitalist provision gave members capacity to attempt leaving that lifestyle behind, an irony they were well aware of. Therefore, many limitations for achieving values in action were not actually due to eco-villagers' ethical flaws, and were beyond their ability to address. If I explored Whakatipu's experience with a perspective that left consumerism unquestioned, or considered residents as responsible for their individual shortcomings, I would not have captured why their value-action gap exists. Research involving such paradigms misses the experiences of people struggling to live ethically against numerous contextual forces that inhibit them from doing so.

While systemic change is clearly needed, there is value in considering individual ethical action as a navigational, strategic progress that is not always based around rigid assessments of success or failure. We need to consider the diversity of individual circumstance, and the interplay this has with overlapping contexts, in ecological living. The same choices will not be possible for every single person; thus, rigidly assessing ethical practice does not account for the diversity of eco-lifestyles that can emerge. Smith (2001) and Haluza-DeLay's (2008) application of habitus to ethical theory assists in making many of these adjustments.

There is still a need to encourage people to reconnect and integrate with their local environments as those in Whakatipu sought to do, so that they might understand that their wellbeing is intrinsically linked with the wellbeing of their environment. As a participant in Kaspar's study said, "information is not the place to start [...] the problems stem from a deeper source – how [people] experience themselves in the world" (2008, p. 20). However, this involves an understanding of how consumer-capitalism affects life in the societies that people have to live in. If this is scaled up to a societal level, the financial disparity within our society becomes a clear problem. Whakatipu members could only pursue an eco-lifestyle due to financial capacity that many others do not possess, and even then they could not achieve all they aspired to. Does this mean that ethical living is even less possible for those with less money? In a rigid assessment of ethical success, it does. However, Singh (2014) argues that for those in circumstances where compromise is required – something eco-villagers are familiar with – negotiating limitations imposed on them is ethical expression in-and-of-itself. Describing how those acting within contradictory tension possess a "noble [energy]" (2014, p. 179), Singh states, "Evaluative terms such as *noble* and *base* do

not name a dichotomy (like good and evil) but coordinates within which, and in excess of which, life forces wax and wane. Ethics examines the conduct of life” (2014, p. 180). Conducting life is an ongoing process – completely correct practice is never fully achieved, and is relative to the circumstances of those undertaking it.

### **Final Reflections**

This research brought me to reflect on my own lifestyle, and how I think about my own ecological behaviour while living within wider society, in a new light. My initial assumptions have been replaced by a more nuanced, fluid understanding of living ecologically in regards to the capacity that my current context affords me, alongside all of the obligations that I need to meet (such as employment, travel, and social interaction). Rather than feeling guilt over unsustainable actions that seem unavoidable, I acknowledge the limitations of my current circumstances. However, exploring opportunities to become more ecological by using the holistic and pragmatic consideration that Whakatipu residents shared with me gives me hope that I will be able to leave behind some of my unsustainable practices. I look forward to the prospect, for example, of being able to establish organic gardens on my own property, and further take control of how I relate to the preconditions of my existence by living closer to the earth. While public transport is too inconsistent for me to utilise and fulfil my obligations, one day I may live somewhere with more extensive public transport. Changing how I live will then appear more feasible, and I will be able to adapt my behaviour to support more sustainable options. All the while, I have hope that systemic change will present new options that I had not even been able to consider. I also, however, feel a greater impetus for helping to bring systemic change about, without fretting over my unsustainable behaviour while doing so.

Finding this more nuanced perspective, which contrasted with my initial thoughts about Whakatipu, has also introduced new reflexivity to my thinking about anthropological research. Before starting research, I thought that I had examined my preconceptions enough, and that any impressions I had of Whakatipu were justified solely by the community’s stated purpose. I had not anticipated the complexity of life that had developed in Whakatipu, just as some of those who lived there had not anticipated this when they started the community. As I approach more research in the future, I will do so with a greater awareness that any of my perceptions should be flexible enough to be adjusted within moments of meeting those I am studying with.

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# Appendix A: Interview Questions

- How did you arrive at living in this eco-village? (Tell me a bit about the journey that brought you into making this transition).
- What were the challenges of making this transition?
- What was the ethic or philosophy behind making this lifestyle choice?
- How have you defined what living sustainably looks like?
- What have been the challenges of sustaining this living?
- How do you see what you are doing, functioning within the wider New Zealand community/society?
- Do you feel there is political pressure being put on this way of life?
- What do you think is stopping others from doing this?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Other questions which followed on in the course of conversation included:

- Is there anything specific that you do on your land?
- Do you think there is more sustainable production that can be done by people in cities?
- How is Whakatipu different from communities you were previously in?
- How has the perspective on environmentalism, and the emphasis on what it is about, changed since you began pursuing sustainability?
- Do you think more people need to try and live simply?