Cultivating Embodied Connections in Biodynamic Agriculture

A comparative study of local meaning-making at Earth Haven Farm in Canada and Nordgard Aukrust in Norway

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Master Thesis in Development, Environment and Cultural Change

Centre for Development and the Environment

UNIVERSITETET I OSLO

May 2019
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Abstract

Nature’s living ecosystems, which sustain all of us, are unravelling, and the world is changing at an unimaginable pace. There is an increasing urgency to move away from the commodification, desacralization and exploitation of natural resources in agricultural systems. Deeper insights into the underlying ethics of food production and consumption can facilitate alternative ways of working with nature for cases where conventional methods are conflicting with values about working on and with the land. This study contributes to an evolving understanding of the relationship between humans and the natural world. Placed within a unique and empirically grounded discussion of spiritual ecology, this thesis takes an ethical approach to explore the cultivation of embodied connections within biodynamic agriculture. These embodied connections lie at the intersection of the individual, the community and the environment. The research is based on a comparative, ethnographic and participatory study of two biodynamic farms: Earth Haven Farm in Canada, and Nordgard Aukrust in Norway. Whilst acknowledging that every biodynamic farm is embedded within broader, nested levels, this study demonstrates that it is at the micro-scale where personal, contingent and embodied relations develop. These, in turn, have the potential to facilitate empathic identification with the earth as a living entity. This study suggests that such processes may offer pathways to developing ethical and active engagement with the living planet, in which we are deeply immersed and with which we are in constant interaction.

Key words: Biodynamic agriculture, spiritual ecology, environmental ethics, embodied connections, community development, Self-realization.
Acknowledgements

A lot of what you tell me I cannot understand, because it is not a part of my world. In order for me to understand, I need to enter your world and you need to be willing to share it with me.

One of my participants said to me that, when we are open to truly listen and learn, to pause our thinking, speaking and acting, we can open new doors to ways of knowing and understanding the world. I wish to thank all the people who participated in my research, for allowing me to enter their world, and for sharing their stories, visions and experiences. Without them, this research would not have been possible.

I wish to express a huge ‘thank you’ to my supervisor, Martin Lee Mueller, for consistently allowing me to follow my own course, while gently steering me in the right direction with his aspiring guidance and constructive feedback. You have challenged me to be bold, to stand up for my work and to keep on growing – as a researcher, a writer, a thinker and an experiencer. Thank you!

I want to thank all the people involved with my department for co-creating a stimulating and comforting environment in which to learn and grow. My sincere gratefulness also goes to Rob van Wilgen for his dedicated language review.

I wish to thank all my friends for the cheering, support and caring they provided. Miriam, words lack to express how grateful I am for having a friend like you: you are my rock in the ocean. Arnar, you were the one to deal with my everyday struggles, my ups and downs, and you stood by me every step of the way. Thank you for patiently (and less-patiently) listening to my endless contemplations, for always believing in me, and for taking me out in nature to reflect on the beautiful and meaningful in life.

Finally, I wish to thank my family for their never-failing encouragement to always follow my heart; throughout my life, my study and now throughout my research. I am grateful for all the beautiful people in my life, who continuously remind me that every small change, every act and every word we speak sends ripples into the world – in the vastness of space and immensity of time. I am beyond words.
In a time of melting ice sheets, in a time of wars, in a time of inequalities, in a time of insatiable hungers, in a time of constant competition, in a time of alienation, in a time of denial,

The freer seed of a sunflower is resting in the palm of my hand.

Hope.
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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AFNs</td>
<td>Alternative Food Networks</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSA</td>
<td>Community Supported Agriculture</td>
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<tr>
<td>IPES</td>
<td>International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems</td>
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<td>MoA</td>
<td>Ministry of Agriculture</td>
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<tr>
<td>NFU</td>
<td>Norwegian Farmer’s Union</td>
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<td>NTB</td>
<td>Norwegian Tourist Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>RTA</td>
<td>Rural Tourism Association</td>
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<td>WWOOF</td>
<td>World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms</td>
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1. Introduction

Imagine how the Earth has its own metabolism, driven by uncountable microbes in the ground, which compost organic waste into essential life-giving soil. Imagine how the trees are the lungs of the Earth, inhaling carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, and exhaling the oxygen that sustains our own breathing. This imagination of the cyclic rhythms of nature’s metabolic exchanges is not only the at heart of an environmentally concerned, biodynamic approach to agriculture, it also comprises the core of the worlding process that gives rise to a new ecological consciousness.

Nature first opened to culture through the furrow of agriculture. Timothy Morton (2016, 82) describes the furrow as the line in the fields, which the ploughman traces and which is then broken by the ploughshare – cultivation. Cultivation is the process of preparing the soil, by ploughing and fertilizing it, for the proceeding growth of crops. Because fertilizing can entail both organic and non-organic matters, I prefer to speak of nurturing the soil. Cultivation is a central process in agriculture, but also appears as the metaphoric process of this study: cultivating fields of thought for new insights.

Food security has always been, and will continue to be, one of the largest challenges of human existence. Ancient agricultural practices are not applicable anymore to feed the continuously growing world population, neither has the industrial agricultural sector proven to be successful in providing food security. Both new and existing demands for agricultural produce will therefore place growing pressures on the planet’s already limited agricultural resources and areas (Tilman et al. 2011). There is an increasing urgency to imagine, build and explore futures that will diversify the metabolic richness of sustainable agriculture. These include: the empowerment of local food systems, closer connections between farmers and consumers, conscious food production and consumption, and living and working in harmony with nature. Such processes may play a critical role in achieving these outcomes. However, before we can visualize and realize solutions, we must come to understand the underlying ideologies of the current patterns of food production and consumption. I will argue in this thesis that food, and the way in which food is produced and consumed, is a powerful symbol in the struggle to a transition to a more sustainable pathway, because the food choices citizens make have deep environmental and social impacts within their communities, as well as globally (Ericksen 2008).
Deeply rooted social, ethical and non-secular problems, and the role they play in ecological issues, are often overlooked in the discourse on agriculture. Therefore, we have not yet come to understand the multidimensionality of agricultural practices that lies at the heart of environmental challenges, and that presents an important set of considerations in the broader field of sustainable development. A critical, open-ended question is, then, how the agricultural sector can contribute to solving these challenges and help sustain a world that is largely shaped by and for humans? Our individual perceptions play an important role in defining our actions. If we want to change people’s actions, we must dig up the roots of their perceptions of existence; their perceptions of connection or alienation from nature, from community, and from themselves.

To fill the literature gap, this thesis explores and identifies how these connections are understood, and in what ways biodynamic agriculture can help us develop a sense of connection to our living environment. Grounded in careful integration of existing literature, empirical data, and sensory experience and intuition, this thesis will address the following main question: How do people at Earth Haven Farm, Canada and Nordgard Aukrust, Norway, cultivate and give meaning to embodied connections in biodynamic farming, and how can this contribute to a deeper understanding of spiritual ecology? In the light of this question, the objective of this study, in the first place, is to apprehend a deeper understanding of the different dimensions of biodynamic agriculture and spiritual ecology. It means to gain insight into local meaning-making of biodynamic farming and the process of Self-realization within social, ecological and spiritual realms. The ultimate goal is to mutually enhance human-Earth relationships, co-created through biodynamic farming practices. To address these objectives, I answer the following sub-questions: What is the local understanding of biodynamic agriculture? How do the participants of this study understand and experience their relationship to nature? How do they bridge the gap to the wider community? And finally, why is it important to reimagine these relationships in the light of developing an ecological consciousness?

1.1 Thesis Outline

In the introduction I have set forth my personal rationale and motivation for this project, after which I have introduced the research questions. I will continue by discussing the theoretical inspirations that are the guiding frames for biodynamic agriculture. Spiritual
ecology is used as a lens to understand the cultivation of embodied connections within the systems of local meaning-making in the two case studies. The extensive literature review aims to create a rubric for the analysis of my empirical data. After having built a theoretical foundation, I will discuss the methodology of this research and the chosen research methods. In the methodology chapter I will also address ethical considerations I have encountered in the process of constructing, performing and analyzing my research. Before starting the empirical chapters, I will give a historical and descriptive overview in the contextualization of the two case studies.

Arriving at the presentation of the research data, the empirical chapters are divided into two complementary parts. Part one is dedicated to the start of my journey and my first case study, which is at Earth Haven Farm in Canada. I will move gradually through three dimensions of analysis: first, the relation between human and nature, in which I set forth how the people at Earth Haven Farm apply biodynamic principles in their way of living and working in close, careful participation with nature. This chapter further addresses how the people at Earth Haven Farm understand and experience the human-nature relationship. Thereafter, I explore the level of the community. Here, I discuss the different ways in which the people of Earth Haven Farm connect and reach out to the wider community, with a main focus on an intellectual approach to raising awareness. Furthermore, I address how and why they apply the model of community supported agriculture (CSA) to support local food networks and inspire people to eat healthy, local and seasonal produce. Finally, I will discuss how the cultivation of embodied connections in biodynamic farming can aid in developing individual ecological consciousness.

In part two, I travel back to Norway and move on to my case study at Nordgard Aukrust. In line with part one, I will explore the three dimensions accordingly. Moreover, I will use my second case study to critically reflect on my first case study. I will start part two by addressing how the people at Nordgard Aukrust relate to nature. I will demonstrate that, while the participants integrate the underlying philosophy of biodynamic agriculture, the practical application of the approach is not a prerequisite for developing a close connection to nature. Next, I will address in what ways the participants create space on the farm for sociality and community. It will become clear that they invite people to deepen their connection to nature and one another in an experiential manner. Lastly, I will set forth how
sensual and deep experiences of nature, through individual and communal farming practices, holds the potential to inspire Self-realization.

In the discussion, I will summarize the most apparent differences and similarities between the two case studies. The findings, then, will be analyzed with regards to the literary framing of this study. In the conclusion, I will provide a brief summary of the research and reiterate the main argument. I will conclude that biodynamic farms offer space for communing more deeply with, and connecting to, our living human and non-human environments. On a final note, I will give additional remarks of consideration and the suggestions for future research that emerged from this research.
2. Theoretical Framework

During the past two centuries, human wealth has advanced as never before. While inequalities still bedevil us, the current generation is living longer, more abundant, and more prosperous lives than any in the history of humanity (Rees 2002). Yet, this civilizational triumph comes at a profound cost; it is increasingly marked by mass extinction of biodiversity, extreme rates of greenhouse gas emissions, depletion of natural resources, desertification of the soils, acidification, overfishing and 'plastification' of our oceans, and the ever-more apparent consequences of climate change (Kothari 1990, Rees 2002, Crist, Rinker, and McKibben 2010, Bennett 2017). Human beings have cultivated a tendency to see themselves as separate from other species. Unlike most other species, they have a history of taking excessively from the Earth’s natural resources, driven by a heedless lust for material growth. Humanity is now not merely influencing the planet, but altering its basic, life-giving systems (Rees 2002). The point of departure of this study is the understanding that the ecological crisis also reflects something deeper and more intimate: an ethical and spiritual crisis. This is one of perspective, meaning and practice. Herein lies not only our indictment, but also hope.

The following quote from Peter Senge addresses the key challenge of humanity today – building a sustainable future – through going back to what in this study is perceived as the roots of the sustainability debate, namely: how people position themselves in relation to nature and to each other, and how people understand these relationships.

One basic way to expand our efficacy is through modern science and technology. But another is through integrated (emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual) growth and enhanced wisdom. This means growing in our sense of connection with nature and one another and learning to live in ways that naturally cultivate our capacity to be human (Senge et al. 2005, 212).

These understandings shape – in part – how we behave towards and (ab)use our environment, and lie at the heart of ecological thinking (Nisbet, Zelenski, and Murphy 2009, Collins 2010, Wahl 2016). Accordingly, consultant and specialist in biologically-inspired whole systems design Daniel Christian Wahl (2016, 14) writes that ‘the false separation between nature and culture is the root cause of many of the converging crises we are facing.’ This is not only a core claim of Wahl, but also one of spiritual ecology as a
discipline. Food systems, agricultural production and consumption are at the core of sustaining human life and hold embodied connections through sensual experience of nature and closer social connections. It is a challenge by itself to study these connections of experiencing food production and consumption as a manifestation of our relation to the environment. Grounded in existing literature, this section will outline a framework for studying connections that move from intellectual and spiritual realms, towards material manifestation of human bodies, plants, soil and cosmos, that exist within the agricultural system.

The theoretical framework will explore the potential of biodynamic farming practices to bridge the gap between people and their food, and create regenerative food systems that (re)connect producers to consumers, and humans to nature. Many alternative food systems draw upon ecological thinking. However, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to address the multitude of food systems. Therefore, the focus will be on a case study of biodynamic agriculture. Exploring how the relationships between people and nature and between people with one another are understood within, cultivated, and affected by, biodynamic principles may contribute to apprehend a holistic understanding of agriculture. Hence, this thesis will look at how these connections are cultivated in biodynamic agriculture through a discourse on spiritual ecology, which draws upon concepts of environmental consciousness, Self-realization and embodiment of this awareness. Spiritual ecology is an emerging field at the interface of academia, environmental studies and philosophies and spirituality. It recognizes the importance of taking people’s (spiritual) attitudes, beliefs, and sense of responsibility towards nature into account (Sponsel 2007, Collins 2010). For this reason, spiritual ecology offers a relevant framework for this study. Moreover, this choice of framing for the analysis of perceptions, attitudes and beliefs within the discipline of spiritual ecology also implies qualitative research an adequate method for exploring this subject.

When the aim is to explore local meaning-making, it is relevant to understand how meaning comes into being. One way to gain insight in this is by tracing the etymology. Following Cassell's Latin Dictionary (Simpson 1977, 547), the Latin word for meaning is sententia.12

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1 The plural of sententia is sententiae and refers to meaning. This research, then, explores a plurality of meanings to obtain a more complete and holistic understanding.

2 Interestingly, sententia can also be translated as ‘a way of thinking’. However, as becomes clear in the sentences that follow, sententia does not only entail rational thinking; it includes multiple ways of sensing. Following this, an alternative interpretation could be ‘a way of knowing’, which in this study is put in the context of ‘ways of knowing nature’ through the sensory experiences in biodynamic farming practices.
Remarkably, the word sententia has its roots in the word *sensus*. The most basic translation of *sensus* is 'sense'. Additionally, it is worth to mention that the dictionary specifies three aspects of *sensus*: first, physical feeling, entailing bodily perception; second, emotional feelings or experiences; and third, intellectual feeling, which is described as 'to realize' or 'to perceive' and refers to the rational mind. It can be interpreted that, historically, meaning-making has not been understood solely as a rational process, but as a process which is co-created by the interplay of different senses: both intellectually and experientially. This understanding of sensory meaning-making is a leitmotif throughout this study.

This theoretical framework consists of three sections: the first part will address the current challenges of agriculture and, with the intention to give insight into the complexity and challenges of existing food systems. It will further conceptualize environmental stewardship as a dominant worldview in Western societies. The second part will discuss spiritual ecology as analytical framework and foundation for *anthroposophy* and *deep ecology* as alternative ecological paradigms that address environmental challenges. The last part explores embodied connections between humans and nature, humans and community, and humans as individual spiritual beings, in the context of biodynamic farming.

### 2.1 Agriculture and Environmental Ethics

#### 2.1.1 The Challenges of Modern Agriculture

Given the fact of human interdependence on the larger ecosystems we need to approach agricultural systems accordingly. Kirschenmann suggests ‘a picture of the Earth which is dynamic, constantly changing, and highly interdependent. The Earth, in other words, is a vibrant biotic community. And agriculture is an integral part of that community’ (2005, 11). Agriculture is broadly understood as the utilization of the planet’s resources and human dependency on the ecosystem (Seyfang 2006). A more specific definition can be drawn from the origin of the word itself. Following Chandrasekaran et al. (2010, 1), the term agriculture is derived from Latin words *ager* (land) and *cultura* (cultivation) and can thus be translated into cultivation of the land. Based on their thorough discussion of agronomical terminologies, this study understands agriculture as the science, practice or art of cultivating the land, growing crops and keeping livestock, to ensure the provision of food and other products.
The food systems of production and provision pose many challenges to today’s societies: producing enough food, producing food in a sustainable way, transporting food, producing and consuming culturally-appropriate foods, etc. Moreover, there are challenges of malnutrition, consuming too many or too few calories, or calories without the necessary nutritional value (Frison 2016). Frison states that conventional, uniform agriculture was initially a way to answer to the growing demand for food in a globalizing world. The consequences of the high demands of our planet are the price paid for mass-production and large-scale industrial farming (Frison 2016). Moreover, the increasing demand for animal protein in Western societies, and conspicuous consumption in general, has a big impact on the ecological footprint that sheds light on the shadows of the excessive consumption culture in Western countries. Globalization of food systems, industrialized means of production and consumption, and the liminality between this, are powerful symbols in the struggle to transition to a more sustainable pathway (Ericksen 2008), as the choices people make have deep environmental and social impacts within their communities and on a larger scale. It is further argued that modern societies have become disconnected from the food they consume, as they often do not have a clue what is in their food, where it comes from or how it is grown (Fischler 1980). Although it is hard to claim these consequences are fully due to unsustainable agricultural systems, they do play an important role.

In response to the abovementioned challenges, dialogue has opened on how to feed a growing population and increase food production in a more sustainable and fair manner. The ecological impacts of conventional agriculture industries, and their reliance on pesticides and preventative use of antibiotics and chemicals (Frison 2016), create an urgency to rethink our ethical position towards food production and consumption through exploring alternative agriculture. Business as usual is insufficient and there is need for a different approach to food production and consumption. A key discussion within the broad discourse on sustainability and sustainable agriculture addresses the benefits and challenges of organic versus non-organic farming and global versus local food networks (Ericksen 2008, Adams and Salois 2010). Organic farming is on the rise, yet skepticism exists for different reasons. One of the questions raised is whether organic agriculture has the capacity to feed the world. Whereas Badgley and Perfecto (2007) argue that organic yields methods can be sufficient to do just that, they do admit that such methods cannot guarantee improvement of food security, as this is largely based on policy-making and economic structures (Badgley and Perfecto 2007). Even though researchers such as Badgley and
Perfecto showcase a high potential of organic food production, we must remain critical towards organic standards and trendiness of 'green labelling'. Many food products are labelled with questionable certifications that aim to protect the biodiversity of species and habitats. Yet, there is a significant amount of biodiversity that persists below the listed thresholds, leaving producers with the opportunity to get certifications whilst continuing unsustainable practices in other spectrums (Edwards and Laurance 2012).

Nevertheless, the number of alternative food networks (AFNs) is rising, and they have developed various ways to combat the agricultural challenges, such as: CSA, permaculture, community gardens and biodynamic farming (Maye and Kirwan 2010). These alternative systems commonly strive for regeneration of the food system. They differ from conventional farming methods, in the first place, by the ways in which they manage the land without the use of pesticides and chemicals. Besides, many AFNs integrate a social dimension, which focuses on the empowerment of local food systems and engaging the local community. Following this, they take on a more integrative approach to agriculture. Given notice to critical questions regarding the 'alternativeness' of organic and local food systems, I argue that there are no perfect systems. Without neglecting the limitations, a large number of existing studies in the broader literature have examined that alternative agriculture has the potential to enhance ecological system thinking, including moral and environmental conservation, community building, sustainable resource management, etc. (Dahlberg 1993, Cone and Myhre 2000, King 2006, Turner and Hope 2014).

Furthermore, it has been argued that the way in which we produce and consume food holds a certain cultural significance, as well as it reflects social and environmental values, beliefs and meanings (Murcott 1982). When the intention is to explore the relation between people and the environment, as is part of this thesis, it is of great importance to understand the extent to which people’s attitudes toward environmental issues are part of broader cultural patterns. The next section will discuss the historical roots of environmental worldviews that lie ground for the alienation between humans and nature.

### 2.1.2 Conceptualizing Environmental Stewardship

Environmental worldviews are – in part – shaped by a culturally imprinted vision on nature. They are the philosophical perspectives on how humans position themselves towards nature and are based on the collective values we hold which determine what is ethically wrong
and right behavior towards nature (Miller and Spoolman 2011). William Cobern, the author of *Thoughts about Nature* and professor in science education and biology, writes: ‘A worldview refers to the culturally dependent, implicit, fundamental organization of the mind. This implicit organization is composed of presuppositions that predispose one to feel, think and act in predictable patterns’ (Cobern 2000, 8). Worldviews provide a non-rational foundation for thought, emotion and behavior. When worldviews are discussed in relation to the environment, we speak of environmental worldviews. Skogen (1999) demonstrates that worldviews are always closely related to cultural patterns, which cover attitudes and orientations towards people’s physical environment.

Environmental stewardship is a widely known environmental worldview. The concept of stewardship can be traced back to the Old Testament. God told Adam to take care of the 'garden', to steward over nature and preserve it for the generations to come (Palmer 2006). White (1967) wrote an influential article on *The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis*, in which he argued that Christianity desacralized nature and opened it up for exploitation. The Bible contains an underlying view of stewardship, namely that God created the Earth for mankind. It is important to note here that Christianity has influenced Euroscientific traditions. The biblical conception of stewardship is a tricky notion that easily translates to ownership over nature. Even though environmental stewardship entails taking care of the Earth through shared responsibly, stewardship by itself holds an inherent idea of being separate from nature: humans are the wardens over the Earth and its resources (White 1967). It can be questioned that, if we were to be stewards of the Earth, we might not be doing a very good job in preserving life on Earth for future generations. James Lovelock wrote with respect to this that: ‘We are no more qualified to be the stewards or developers of the Earth than are goats to be gardeners’ (Lovelock quoted in Taylor 2010, 36). Moreover, it can be questioned to what extend the idea of stewardship neglects the intrinsic value of nature beyond its instrumental utility to humanity. Agriculture inherently entails a preference for human interests over that of other living beings, which, especially, leads to critiques from deep ecologists (Ikerd 2008).

In a way, commercial agriculture and industrialization can be seen as the alter-native way. Despite the critical note on the notion of stewardship made in this previous section, many

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3 I choose to use the word alter-native, by means of other-than-native, because historically conventional agriculture is the more modern system – not the native. Conversely, the wide variety of sustainable food systems is often gathered under the label of ‘alternative food networks’. These, however, incorporate a more historically common and nature-friendly approach to food production.
ancient traditions perceived their role to be stewarding nature. In short, the concept of stewardship can be interpreted in vastly different ways; some of which lead to more instrumental ways of relating to the land, and other that lead to more intrinsic ways of relating to the land.

If we want to influence people’s attitudes toward the environment, we must understand how such attitudes are part of systems of interpretation and meaning, that is: how they are embedded in cultural patterns (Skogen 1999). It can be argued that the Euroscientific perspective generally has created a relatively instrumental worldview towards nature. In comparison, ancient and indigenous ways of knowing nature, can be thought of as more experiential (Aikenhead and Michell 2011). I argue here that there is an urgency to shift the paradigm from one that is largely industrial and conventional, to one that is predominantly regenerative and ecological.

2.1.3 A Paradigm Shift

Dahlberg (1993) understands regenerative systems indistinguishable from concepts of process and context, wherein the wholeness and adaptability of food systems provide people with their basic needs of food across multiple generations. In order to establish regenerative food systems, Dahlberg (1994) suggests three key developments that are essential: first, a restructuring of the industrial agriculture; second, the study and embracing of indigenous agricultural traditions; third, a shift in conceptualization of values towards the food system.

In agreement with this last suggestion, the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES) argues that it is necessary to move away from uniformity towards diversity. The IPES has done research on the current agri-food system crisis, and states that a fundamentally different agricultural model is required to establish more diversified farming landscapes (Frison 2016). Nevertheless, it will be difficult to develop a universally applicable agricultural model, as there is a boundless variety of geographical, climatic, economic, political and cultural landscapes. It is important to note that trade-offs have to be established and that there are no guarantees that alternative food system approaches will succeed where current systems fail. It is a challenge to reconcile ecological protection and conservation, social equity and food security. The IPES suggests a paradigm shift from industrial agriculture to diversified agricultural systems (Frison 2016). In the light of
reported paradigm shift, it is conceivable that spiritual ecology can make an important contribution to this, as it offers a constructive, critical, and audacious framework that can lie the foundation for rethinking the current food system, and the way people position themselves towards nature in general. This will be set forth in the next part.

2.2 Ecological Paradigms

Whereas the role of spirituality in the ecological crisis remains highly contested, it may aid in providing a broader understanding of humans’ place in the world. There is a degree of uncertainty around the terminology of spirituality and consciousness, and both terms are often used without precision. In order to address this, it is important to define the concept of *environmental consciousness* and how such awareness comes about. Environmental consciousness or environmental awareness can be broadly understood as people’s perception of their relation to nature. This opposes the prevailing idea of industrial capitalism that people are to dominate and control nature (Krause 1993, Skogen 1999, Lafuente and Sánchez 2010). According to Skogen, this is a fundamental ideology that has inspired new ecological paradigms over the past decennia (Skogen 1999). Historically, this could be traced back – at least – to the publication of Rachel Carson’s book *Silent Spring* (Carson 1962). Whereas Carson definitely had predecessors, Silent Spring did mark a beginning, by many accounts, of large-scale, international environmental movements.

The importance of feeling connected to nature has been an early theme in the writing of both environmental philosophers and ecologists. Berry and Wolf-Watz draw on the work of Aldo Leopold and Henry David Thoreau⁴, arguing that environmental connectedness entails a physical, affective and rational relation between humans and nature. They define the term *environmental connectedness perspective* as ‘the idea of nature's potential for individual transformation towards higher levels of environmental concern and pro-environmental behavior’ (2014, 198). Remarkably, in this perspective they include a multitude of concepts familiar to the discourse of spiritual ecology, for instance: affinity, sensitivity, an ecological Self and commitment. The term connectedness on itself is, in this thesis, defined according to Schultz’s understanding, who refers to it as the extent to which

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⁴ Aldo Leopold and Henry David Thoreau were both well-known philosophers concerned with environmental thinking. Thoreau’s work dates back to the 19th Century and Leopold’s work belongs to the 20th Century.
individuals include other living beings within their cognitive representation or identification of Self. This includes both human and non-human life (Schultz 2002, 67).

The connection between human and nature is characterized by, on the one hand, intellectual knowing and perceiving nature, and, on the other hand, experiential interacting with and living within nature (Russell et al. 2013a). Russell et al. state that ‘…more fully characterizing our intangible connections with nature will help shape decisions that benefit people and the ecosystems on which we depend’ (Russell et al. 2013a, 473). In the following paragraphs, I discuss three important paths of knowledge of the relation between humans and their environment that each can inform, challenge, and inspire biodynamic agriculture.

2.2.1 Spiritual Ecology

Whereas a multitude of environmental paradigms integrate diverse social and cultural factors that influence existing food systems, I have found that they generally do not include conversations on the spirituality of ecology. Spiritual ecology, too, is a response to current environmental issues, but it concerns itself with people’s spiritual attitudes, beliefs, and sense of responsibility toward the Earth (Sponsel 2007, Collins 2010). However, with the scientific realm still being dominated by a rather naturalistic-scientific paradigm (Aikenhead and Michell 2011), spirituality in relation to agriculture has been previously assessed only to a very limited extent. Many researchers withhold themselves from talking about spirituality explicitly because it is a contested topic. Therefore, this study addresses spiritual and ethical perspectives on agricultural practices, so far under-researched in the scientific literature. One of the tough challenges for all researchers in this domain is to gain a deeper understanding of spiritual ecology and communicate it accordingly.

Spiritual practices and beliefs have always played, and possibly always will play, an important role in the meaning-making processes and the understanding of life experiences. As the role of religion becomes less apparent in Western societies, the term spirituality has become a more inclusive substitution (Taylor 2001). The question then becomes how best to understand spirituality. Kirschenmann (2005) states that spirituality provides a way of understanding our world in terms of relationships and connections between all living beings. Additionally, he writes: ‘Since Descartes insisted that facts and values must be kept in separate worlds, both scientists and farmers have been reluctant to use the word
'spirituality' in connection with anything having to do with science or agriculture’ (2005, 9). Addressing the same remark, Dr. Sandra Krempl notes that many people – especially in the academic sphere – seem uncomfortable with talking about spirituality in order not to awake controversy (Krempl 2014, 2). I draw upon Krempl’s argument that sustainability frameworks are incomplete without consideration for spirituality. Following this, she frames spirituality as: ‘A spontaneous movement in society, a new interest in the reality of spirit and its effects on life, health, community and well-being.’ She perceives spirituality as a higher level of thinking and embracing meaning, hope, ethical values and connectedness (Krempl 2014, 11). Krempl further argues that people's conscious and dynamic spirit is a driving force behind all systems (Krempl 2014, 5). In accordance to this, Khisty (2006) notes that spiritual systems are generally discussed in terms of visions about afterlife or deities, but in essence they are rather an orientation to the cosmos and our role within this cosmos. From this point of view, spiritual systems are closely connected with ecological systems (Tucker and Grim 2001 in Khisty 2006, 296). A profound thinker who cannot be left out of this conversation is Thomas Berry, the mentor of both Tucker and Grim. Berry wrote the eloquent book A Dream of the Earth, in which he argues that in order for both the planet and humanity to flourish, there is a necessity to transform the way we think and interact with our environment. Berry sets out a potential path that guides and encourages people to move beyond exploitation of the Earth and renew human participation in the natural environment through establishing a restorative relationship (Berry 1988). In another one of his aspiring books, Evening Thoughts: Reflecting on Earth as Sacred Community, Berry writes that the first condition for creating a flourishing future for the entire Earth community is ‘to realize that the universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects’ (2010, 17). Put differently, we have to come to understand ourselves, not as observers or proprietors, but as participants of this communion. The perspectives that are discussed in this section have a strong potential to alter the way humanity innately uses nature and natural resources in the future.

Within the field of spiritual ecology, it is relevant to introduce another term: noetic ecology. The word noetic is derived from the Greek word noētos, which is broadly translated as 'intellect', but actually comes from the world noein, which means 'to perceive'. Ecology is derived from the Greek word oikos, which is generally understood as house or habitation (Organisation for Noetic Ecology n.d.). Ecology commonly entails the study of living beings and their relation to one another and to the environment. Combined, noetic ecology
captures the innate ability of humans to acquire understanding of their environment beyond intellectual ways of knowing and habitual modes of perception (Foltz 2013). A similar perspective associated with human meaning-making is discussed by philosopher Ernst Cassirer (1944) in An Essay on Man. Cassirer develops his view of humanity as Animal Symbolicum, opposed to Aristotle’s Animal Rationale. He argued that reason and logic are inadequate to comprehend the richness and meaning of human life. In fact, Cassirer strongly believed that human life was largely defined by symbolism, which enables humans to give meaning to their constructed environment. Following this, he sought to understand human nature by studying symbolic meaning-making in all aspects of people’s experience (Cassirer 1944, Leroux 2011). With this in mind, I argue that it is important to include the way people give meaning and understand their relationship with their environment, not solely through logic, but also through experiential ways of knowing nature.

In short, spiritual ecology embraces a cultural awareness of kinship with and dependence on the natural environment for the sake of the continuity of all life. In terms of agriculture, this encourages us to rethink and reimagine humankind’s relation to nature, to food and to consumption. Meaning-making processes are an essential part of understanding this. It is argued that individuals engage in spiritual ecology in three ways: practically, intellectually and spiritually (Sponsel 2012). In this study, these are translated into three dimensions that are recurring themes throughout the thesis: first the physical experience of the human-nature relationship; second, the community level where there is space for sharing knowledge and experiences between people; third, the development of individual ecological consciousness.

### 2.2.2 Deep Ecology

The birthing of the well-known philosophy of deep ecology is to be brought back to the great pioneer of thought Arne Naess. Deep ecology criticizes the underlying premises of industrial growth in societies and raises awareness for deep-seated perceptions that humans hold of the value of nature. This understanding of being a component of nature gives a meaning and purpose to life that moves beyond financial success, fame, political power and other temptations of modern imaginary (Naess and Sessions 1986, Naess 1988). Naess advocates moving beyond the arrogance of humanity that threatens the whole biosphere and acknowledges the importance of deep connection with the interconnected web of
beings. Næss invites us to ‘deepen our conversation with each other and with the beings of nature by extending our questioning and our identification’ (Naess and Sessions 1986, 3).

Developing an ecological Self embodies the inherent connection of the individual and development of environmental consciousness. Næss further introduced the concept of Self-realization, which captures a holistic principle of self-actualization, but in harmony with the rest of the environment. It transcends the notion of self-interest and is proposed to result in environmental-friendly behavior (Naess 1987). Besthorn (2002, 61) writes about the sense of Self in deep ecology:

Deep ecology’s philosophical, spiritual and deep experiential reconceptualization of self goes well beyond the modern, Western sense of identifying self in relation to other humans or human attributes. Deep ecology extends the concept of self to encompass a deep interconnectedness with all individuals, by which they mean both people and the whole of nature.

However, I argue that Næss’ sense of Self is not limited to individuals, but extends also to larger social and ecological communities, to presences such as mountains and rivers, to processes, and to the larger planetary web as a whole. One needs to be physically present within these biotopes to fully grasp the ‘deep’ in deep ecology. David Abram (2014, 102) speaks of this dimensionality as ‘depth’:

In truth, a space has depth only if one is situated somewhere within that space. A cluster of boulders, or a grove of trees, may be said to have a particular depth only if you are situated, bodily, in the same world as those rocks or those trees.

With the alteration he draws attention precisely to the felt, phenomenological dimension of being embedded, as a living being, in the depth of the terrain. This is the first-hand experience and perception on which value is placed within this thesis. Abram further argues that bodily encounters with the natural world are vital for experiencing the depth within it. In fact, he underlines that: ‘We only ever experience the actual world from our embodied, two-legged perspective down here in the thick of things’ (Abram 2014, 102). I would add to this that this depth becomes multidimensional, more so, when it is not just felt, as in experienced through bodily touch, but also sensed, enriched by an intuitive knowing. It is important to consider this subtle distinction between feeling and sensing.
Stephan Harding, too, makes the distinction between subtle ways of knowing. He writes that: ‘Science is a dangerous gift unless it can be brought into contact with the wisdom that resides in the sensual, intuitive and ethical aspects of our nature.’ He argues that we need to complement our rational mind with other ways of knowing that are based on experiencing nature (Harding 2006, 26). Harding brings forward three important, experiential ways of knowing: first, the sensual aspect, which we know through the senses; second, people’s intuitive capabilities; and third, the ethical aspects that we know through feelings. These three ways of knowing, so long neglected in the Western canon, must complement the rational mind – which he here calls ‘the dangerous gift of science’ and which in this thesis is understood as the intellectual way of knowing. This will appear an important claim throughout this thesis.

In addition to this, I draw upon Turner’s (2011, 515) understanding of embodiment as ‘the idea that our everyday engagement with the world is a bodily experience.’ However, it is argued that reflection is needed to embody and make sense of new information or new experiences, and manifest change in any way (Hiemstra 2009). Næss incorporates this reflection in his aforementioned concept of Self-realization. In his ecosophy or ecosophy T (Naess 1990), he speaks of Self-realization as a process of identification with individual animals or plants, with other species such as ladybugs, blackbirds, dolphins, or even microorganisms, but also with landscapes (Naess 2001, 222). Following his argument, when one experiences a widening identification with the ecological Self, one naturally adheres to environmental ethics and acts upon altruistic, ecological consciousness (Naess 1995, 226). Næss further discusses how one can obtain ecological knowledge and expand one’s ecological consciousness. The ecological knowledge has a threefold path of ‘deep’ senses, well-explained by Stephan Harding in his book Animate Earth (Harding 2006, 56-58). They are discussed in the following paragraphs.

First, deep experience encompasses the full experience of being one with one’s environment, evoked through close contact with nature. Næss believed that anyone can experience identification and a sense of oneness if they are willing to pursue a life in the wild. He argued that one must get away from the distractions of the city, because it takes time to develop a sensitivity for nature (Naess 1989, 177). However, Harding states that

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5 Harding illustrates these with discussing one philosopher each who embodies this: Abram for the sensual aspect, Leopold for the intuitive aspect, and Næss for the ethical aspect.
people can also have deep experiences in mundane, everyday activities. In my personal understanding, deep experience is a profound sense of one’s felt connection with all life, and an Earth-based embeddedness and belonging to this life.

Second, deep questioning entails the critical reflections on the ideological premises people hold. It addresses uncomfortable questions that challenge prevailing, unsustainable paradigms in society, such as: why have we cultivated a culture of exploitation? And how can we develop a culture of interbeing? Asking these questions can inspire someone to experience a sense of deep commitment, which can take shape through, for example: activism, grassroot movements, or the general speaking up on behalf of all life. It is interesting to note that what we observe is not nature in essence itself, rather it is nature the way it is exposed to our own questioning and understanding.

Third, deep commitment comprises the cultivated attitude of care and responsibility towards all life. It is the willingness to adapt and the active deeds of adapting choices and behavior to the benefit of all life. One can access the circle at any point, as it is a not a static pyramid. Rather, it is a way of relating and questioning (Harding 2006, 56-58). For this reason, in the continuum of this thesis, the threefold path will be referred to as a cycle, because in my understanding it is rather a cyclic, spiraling loop, than a linear path.

Deep ecology has been vigorously challenged by many, including social ecologist Murray Bookchin, who stresses that deep ecology neglects the social systems that impact environmental thinking. Social ecology, then, reflects on our own systems of community building, consumption, culture, etc., and focuses on reconstruction of these structures to harmonize humanity with nature (Bookchin 1987). Social ecology, inspired by decentralist thinkers such as William Morris and Peter Kropotkin6, rejects 'biocentrism' and 'anthropocentrism', or any 'centrism' for that matter, because it does not adhere to any form of hierarchy or domination. Speaking of centrism, Daniel Quinn perceives anthropocentrism, to place humans in an order of being separated from nature, as 'the most dangerous idea in existence' (Quinn 2006), because it can be used – whether appropriately or not – as an excuse to take from nature for humanities own benefits, regardless of the consequences. In his book The Ecology of Freedom Bookchin advocates for combining nature and society – or ecology and sociology – into a conscious, ethical and rational

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6 Read more about the decentralisation theories of William Morris and Peter Kropotkin in (Kropotkin 1978, andMcCulloch 1984).
'thinking nature' (Bookchin 1982). On the one hand, I agree with Bookchin’s claim that deep ecology neglects – to a certain extent – the influence of the social realm on people’s perception of and attitude towards nature. Following this, this study includes the social realm at the level of the community. On the other hand, Bookchin’s focus remains largely on people’s rational capabilities. Social ecology does not have the same degree of consideration for bodily sensibilities or intuitive senses as Næss, Abram and Harding embrace in their thinking.

### 2.2.3 Anthroposophy

Anthroposophy is the philosophy that underlies biodynamic agriculture. In the light of this research, which is applied to agricultural systems that address spiritual and ecological principles of food production, it is important to discuss the key aspects of anthroposophical thinking.

Anthroposophy originates from the Greek words *anthropos* and *sophia*, meaning the wisdom of the human being. It was first introduced by Rudolf Steiner, who defined anthroposophy as a spiritual science of the human being in connection to the universe (da Veiga 2013). Steiner (1984, 177) brought the term anthroposophy into existence as a path of knowledge, which he defined as follows:

> Anthroposophy is […] spiritually acquired knowledge; and this knowledge applies not only to the human being, but takes in all that can be experienced of the spiritual world by spiritual perception, just as the sensory world is experienced by sense perception. Because this other, inwardly-perceiving human being is our spirit form, we can designate the knowledge this inner being acquires as spiritual science.

Anthroposophy is a philosophy that is practically applied to the benefit of society with regards to education, agriculture, medicine, sociology and economy. Similar to other philosophies, it addresses questions of existence and the nature of humanity, and humans’ relation to the natural world. Steiner developed it as a necessary addition to natural science research (da Veiga 2013, 127). It acknowledges the inherent value of nature and all its living beings, but emphasizes on humans spiritual and self-conscious abilities. Therein, it aims at establishing an impulse to nurture the individual soul and the human society. Anthroposophy understands human society as an interconnected and rhythmic cycle within the larger cycles of nature (Sehmsdorf 2016). Moreover, it perceives human existence as a
microcosmos within the universal macrocosmos, which is the whole of subtle external and internal forces that we perceive through our senses. Humanity's microcosmos, Steiner argues, is a reflection of planetary metabolism and the laws of nature in the macrocosmos (Abern 1983). Natural science aims at obtaining an objective understanding of all that exists. However, to achieve self-knowledge in the light of understanding one’s spiritual nature and both individuality and interconnectedness, anthroposophy aims to build a bridge between spiritual and natural existence, and the dichotomy of the inner and outer world (Steiner 2010, 3-4). In short, harmonizing these two existences, and acquiring self-consciousness is the essence of anthroposophy.

Having discussed the basic understandings of anthroposophy, it is important to note that it has not remained uncriticized. The most common critique stresses that anthroposophy is unscientific, due to its inclusion of the esoteric aspects that are considered beyond the scope of scientific research, and therefore defy falsification. Schieren (2011) rightly remarks that it cannot be expected that everyone acknowledges the supersensible knowledge that anthroposophists claim to obtain. Hence, critics hesitate to recognize anthroposophy as a science. Moreover, he argues that it would require a complete scientific paradigm shift, which cannot be achieved by anthroposophy alone (Schieren 2011). Although it is relevant in the context of this thesis to shed light on criticism towards anthroposophy, I do wish to point out that within this thesis anthroposophy is solely discussed with the intention to provide a more complete background of biodynamic agriculture.

A large part of anthroposophy is agriculture and the way in which food systems function in relation to society. Subsequently, Steiner developed the biodynamic movement. Biodynamic agriculture is regenerative in nature, and aims at maintaining a nutritious and balanced soil. It provides specific prescriptions of soil treatment, and moments for sowing and harvesting produce according to a planting calendar. In accordance to anthroposophical thinking, biodynamic agriculture strives for a relationship of mutual care and responsibility between humans and nature (Steiner 2004). Moreover, Steiner found that the food quality in the community was degrading, and he identified man-made chemicals, pesticides and fertilizers as a root problem. Interestingly, Steiner wrote about these issues before the aforementioned book Silent Spring by Carson: whereas Carson’s book was first published in 1962, Steiner’s publications go back to the late 1800s and early 1900s. Silent Spring, addressing the destructive consequences of pesticides, became a worldwide bestseller and
lied foundation for many environmental movements. Another interesting remark is that Næss is one of the environmental thinkers who frequently cited Carson’s book as a main inspiration for starting the deep ecological movement and creating the philosophy that went along with the movement.

The spiritual ecological nature of ecosophy and anthroposophy add layers to the discourse on the root of people’s environmental thinking that lead them to position themselves in a certain way towards nature and structure food systems accordingly. Nonetheless, I believe that it is well justified to argue that building a culture of awareness and action is the great challenge of our time: to build and nurture sustainable communities (Khisty 2006). Anthroposophy, and biodynamic agriculture subsequently, aim to inspire this. Whereas deep ecology holds the certain controversial idea that humans are part of nature, but also the problematic force that brings disharmony, anthroposophy accentuates the importance of community building (The Anthroposophical Society in America 2013). In the upcoming part I will further explore this social dimension of agriculture. Moreover, I will discuss how the aforementioned connections of human and nature, and human and community, may become embodied through the practice of biodynamic agriculture.

### 2.3 Embodied Connections in Biodynamic Agriculture

Grounded in the broader environmental paradigms and philosophical perspectives that have been set forth in the previous sections, I will now provide a general introduction of biodynamic agriculture. Thereafter, I will proceed to explicate the three dimensions of embodied connections.

Biodynamic agriculture, which has been briefly introduced earlier, can be considered, as I argue, an approach to agriculture where spiritual and physical realms can meet. Many authors and practitioners understand biodynamic agriculture in its most simple explanation, namely that biodynamic agriculture aims to move beyond just organic. However, a more complete understanding is to be found in its name, that is: biodynamic farming has a holistic approach that acknowledges the interrelation of the living (bio) and the energetic (dynamic) parts of this agricultural ecosystems. Rudolf Steiner constructed the biodynamic compost preparations with the aim to reinvigorate the life forces in the land. His instructions entail ways of treating the manure, compost and soil (Steiner 2004, Phillips and Rodriguez 2006,
Sedlmayr et al. (2016). The preparations of dandelion, quartz, horsetail, manure, bone char and tar, and other herbs, composite the B500 and B501 preparations. Critics address the fact that not all of these herbs are available in different regions across the globe, and that the prescriptions are somewhat Eurocentric. Thus, it can be argued that soil quality does not necessitate specific herbs, but rather relies on a wide variety of minerals, herbs and micro-biotic life (Carpenter-Boggs, Kennedy, and Reganold 2000, Chalker-Scott 2013).

Raupp (1999) made another remark on the specific traits of biodynamic agriculture and the complication they bring forth. The high degree of specialization in biodynamics, such as soil biology and plant physiology, moon calendar systems, etc., make it complex, but also important to understand (Raupp 1999). So how can we better understand the complexity of biodynamic agriculture? The next part explores the potential of biodynamic to establish a new and living relationship between people and the surrounding natural forces. These living relationships are in this thesis described as embodied connections, which, together, make up the multiple dimensions of agriculture.

2.3.1 Humans and Nature

One of the key challenges in agricultural systems is the conventional idea that the farm is an individual unit (Raupp 1999). Opposing this understanding, Turinek et al. (2009) state that biodynamic agriculture strives for ‘diversified, resilient and ever-evolving farms, which could provide ecological, economical and physical long-term sustainability for humankind’ (2009, 146). The energetic aspect is most apparent in *esotery*, which is an outstanding principle of biodynamic farming and anthroposophy. Esotery mainly entails making use of the energy from nature. Esotery originates from the Greek word ἐσωτερικός, ἐσω meaning 'within' and τερικός meaning 'frame', but it is widely translated as 'belonging to an inner circle'. In short, it relies on the belief that the soil, plants, animals, microorganism and farmer work together in one close agricultural circle (Singh 2008).

Furthermore, biodynamic agriculture builds upon a natural approach that intends to heal the soil, and therefore to heal the Earth. Soil is the core of life according to biodynamic thinking. ‘Soil is not dirt – soil is the dynamic, spirit-filled basis for life. Soil is a living

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7 A critical remark can be made here regarding the fact that a farm always participates in the larger energy and nutrient cycles of the planet. Moreover, farms generally also function in a human-made food system. Instead, the closed cycle can be seen as an ideal format where farmers do not bring in refined resources.
being’ (Sehmsdorf 2016, 7). Biodynamic agriculture acknowledges that soil itself can be alive, and that the fertility and vitality of the soil give life to the plants that grow in it (Wildfeuer 1995). The biodynamic farm aims to be diversified and self-contained, and it recognizes subtle relations in nature in order to learn to work with them creatively (Wildfeuer 1995).

The subtle relationships on the farm between people and nature become embodied through physically being present in nature and working with the land. This relates back to Abram’s thorough description of the depth one can experience when one is present in a landscape. To exemplify this embodiment, Turner (2011) has found two ways of embodied practices in farm areas: first, there is the bodily farm work itself, creating an intimate connection with the specific place. This is an embodied engagement with the uniqueness of place. Through this engagement and experience, people can develop a deeper connection with nature and the food system. Turner explicates that the act of working on the land and the farm can be articulated as a partnership with nature (Turner 2011). Second, there is the experience of nourishment of the body, stimulated and triggered by eating food that is grown with effort and care in fertile soil. This experience is strongly related to physical and emotional health. Studies of nature’s positive impact on human health are well documented. For example, Russell et al. (2013b) synthesized a multidisciplinary study on the benefits of nature for the well-being of people. They found that ecological connections with life at large have a positive effect on psychological, emotional and physical health of people. I am not seeking to confirm or contradict these finding; I am solely interested in how this is experienced by the people involved in my case study and how they give meaning to their connection with nature.

In short, biodynamic agriculture understands the farm as a living system that includes the soil, the farmer, the animals and all other aspects, rather than individually operating actors. Biodynamic farming intends to give as much to the earth as is taken from it and not to take more than is needed (Steiner 2004)\(^8\).

\(^8\) No page numbers are mentioned in the book. The reference is drawn from the introductory chapter written by Hugh Courtney.
2.3.2 Humans and Community

Daniel Christian Wahl (2016) argues for a regenerative design where the individual, community and environment become integrated and social, ecological and economic factors reinforce each other. He critically notes that competitive benefits are short-lived and collaboration is necessary when the goal is to establish a regenerative culture (Wahl 2016). Subsequently, it can be interpreted that the current competitive and individualistic model in Western societies is not sustainable. Underlining the importance of cooperation between people, Christina King (2008) demonstrates how communities are taking a leading position in developing sustainable agricultural systems through collective learning, sharing economy and relationship building. An illustration of King’s argument is the increasing number of AFNs and community gardens. Highlighting the social nature of these emerging agricultural systems, Russel et al. write that: ‘Gardening has been found to contribute to building social capital and social networks while simultaneously reducing stress and encouraging nurturing characteristics’ (Russell et al. 2013b, 490). This statement showcases the importance to include the community-based aspect of agriculture in my research. Russel et al. address a disconnection that is found between people and the food they consume, and between producers and consumers. Accordingly, Turner (2011) discusses in his article on sustainability, food systems and community gardens, that the expansion of food systems to the global level enhanced this disconnection. He further states that localization of food systems, through projects such as community gardening and community supported agriculture, contributes to social inclusion and community-building (Turner 2011).

Alternative approaches to food production, such as CSA and biodynamic farming, inherently hold the intention to contribute to the development of the social dimension of agriculture, including: community building, participation, social inclusion and creating space for a sharing economy (King 2006). Eating is a connecting practice that signals an immediate social, cultural and economic standing (Maxey 2006). Many farmers offer additional activities for the members to enhance a sense of community. In this way, farmers can teach community members about the farm and about how food is grown (Cooley and Lass 1998). Through an increased involvement of the community around the farm with the farming experience, people can become (re)connected to each other and to their food. As briefly mentioned earlier, CSA is another alternative food network that acknowledges and
addresses the social dimension of agriculture. It can be practiced separate or together with biodynamic farming. CSA more specifically aims at closing the gap between producer and consumer by enhancing direct contact with the farmer at a market, by visiting a farm, or participating in food production oneself (Lamb 1994, Ostrom 1997, Cone and Myhre 2000, Ravenscroft et al. 2012). This is a desirable step in reaching a more sustainable lifestyle and a powerful tool to overcome the virtual detachment between the person working, the product and the consumer.

2.3.3 A Sense of Self

The prevalent anthropocentric nature of Western culture has a tendency to emphasize and encourage independence and agency of individuals (Besthorn 2002). This alienation inherently rejects the Self from the natural world, which is described in more detail by Berman (1984, 3) as follows:

There is no ecstatic merger with nature, but rather total separation from it. Subject and object are always seen in opposition to each other. I am not my experiences, and thus not really a part of the world around me . . . everything is an object, alien, not me; and I am ultimately an object too, an alienated 'thing' in a world of other, equally meaningless things. This world is not of my own making: the cosmos cares nothing for me, and I do not really feel a sense of belonging.

This powerful quote touches upon the loss of a sense of place and belonging in the world around us, and thus a loss of connection. Addressing this disconnect, Besthorn (2002) argues that experiential practice of nature and wilderness is a promising strategy in aiding people to realize their ecological identity. He further notes that the emergence of an ecological Self offers a new way for inspiring experiential and spiritual expressions that bind people to the natural realm. Douglas Christie (2013) conceived the term contemplative ecology, which understands nature as center of spirituality and spiritual practices. Contemplative ecology entails cultivating an awareness of the interconnectedness in life. This awareness lies at the intersection of detachment from distractions of designed environments and deep engagement with the living environment. It further requires settling one’s attention and calming intellectual thinking, which allows one to strengthen the ability to commune more deeply with one’s environment (Christie 2013). I find alignment between Christie’s contemplative ecology and Næss’ notion of Self-realization. Along the same
lines, Næss argued that one needs time in nature for contemplation to come to realizations about the interconnectedness of life (Naess 1987). Both concepts can be linked to noetic ecology and the argument that rational thinking and habitual modes of perception need to be complemented by perceptions that are gained through the subtle senses. These concepts ultimately aim at cultivating an ecological consciousness that enables one to discern the interrelationships across the dynamic wholeness of the world as it is. Developing this understanding is an essential step in understanding and questioning why we treat our environment the way we do (Besthorn 2002). This is a core argument in this thesis.

It is also well-acknowledged that childhood experiences are essential when it comes to people’s perception of the development of an ecological Self. A number of authors have recognized that exposure to nature has significant benefits for children’s (and adults’) health (Wells and Lekies 2006, Hinds and Sparks 2008, Nisbet, Zelenski, and Murphy 2009, Cheng and Monroe 2012). More specifically, Cheng and Monroe (2012) argue that when children are in close contact with their natural environment, they are more likely to develop an enjoyment of nature, a sense of responsibility, empathy for other living beings, and a sense of oneness with their natural environment. A comprehensive description of this is given by Richard Louv, an outstanding author who spotlights the disconnection of children from nature. Louv coined the term nature-deficit disorder, which underlines the importance of reconnecting to nature (Charles and Louv 2009, Louv 2013). Louv’s most well-known books are Last Child in the Woods, The Nature Principle and Vitamin N. In the latter, he sets forth how nature boosts creativity and mental acuity and promotes health and well-being through reducing stress and depression. The abovementioned literature suggests that people’s perceptions of nature are partly dependent on prior – childhood – experiences.

The renewal of the perception of an ecological Self acknowledges an identification with non-human beings. Parallely, Thomashow (1996) notes in his book on the Ecological identity: Becoming a reflective environmentalist that there is a necessity for a revival of awareness of the individual’s connectedness to the environment (Thomashow 1996). Micah Ingalls illustrates this argument with the example of landscapes. According to Ingalls, landscapes play an important role in the way they affect the development of people’s identity, both through physical presence and socially constructed landscape meanings (Ingalls 2012). The former is influenced by the allowed human behavior circumscribed by
a particular landscape. The latter entails normative and socially constructed ideas about the role, and the meaning of this role, of an individual within the landscape. For example, the role of a steward, farmer, hunter, etc. (Ingalls 2012). In this research, this role would be the one of farmer or gardener.

In biodynamic agriculture the path of Self-realization is given shape through a spiritual connection with nature on the one hand. On the other hand, it is shaped through physical interaction with the land, when one immerses oneself in it, as aforementioned in the discussion on Næss’ ecosophy. These two are not to be understood as separate. Instead, the spiritual connection may become embodied through physically being present within the landscape, as an active participant and component of the larger cycles.

### 2.4 Conclusion

I still argue that one of the underlying causes of unsustainable behavior can be brought back to the prevailing detachment and disconnection between humans and nature, and human and community. Agricultural systems contain embodied connections between the earth, the food we grow and consume, and our cultures and communities. If it is possible to re-align the different dimensions of embodied connections, this may contribute to shedding light on a collective 'blind spot' in addressing the challenge of living sustainably on the Earth, by accessing a deeper engagement and reciprocity in the community to accelerate sustainable solutions at the local level.

Although literary and empirical studies have addressed people’s attitude towards the environment, these attitudes are easily labelled under the label of 'pro-environmental'. The vast diversity of attitudes should be acknowledged, studied and understood within systems of meaning and interpretation (Skogen 1999). Previous research can only be considered a first step towards a more profound understanding of the everyday experiences, beliefs and motives of local people engaged in biodynamic farming. Hence, this extensive and participatory research has the potential to develop a deeper understanding of people’s relation to the community and to nature.

This chapter has provided an analytical framework for the empirical chapters. Together, this analytical work and the upcoming empirical work have the potential to contribute to mapping, elucidating, and integrating the multidimensionality of biodynamic agriculture.
The theoretical concepts discussed in this framework are a foundation for analyzing the data that has been collected during the case studies. They will function as a lens to explore ways of knowing and experiencing nature, building community, and expressions of Self-realization in biodynamic farming. The micro-level engagement on the biodynamic farm may ripple further into connection to the broader natural world and communal spaces. In this light, embodied connections may extend beyond the borders of biodynamic farms and intimately embed environmental awareness in other day-to-day practices. In brief, this chapter has cultivated the soil for nurturing, and harvesting, insights into regenerative approaches to agriculture; approaches that enable an ecological consciousness from which humanity may seek to cultivate a more sustainable and conscious lifestyle, and ecological integrity. In this respect, the chapter embraces the grey zone of spirituality without neglecting critical reflections. Spiritual ecology is not first and foremost a theory; it describes a way of being – and being human – in the world. It integrates science and personal perceptions of both the natural and spiritual realms derived through the senses, and thus combines intellectual and experiential ways of knowing nature.
3. Methodology and Methods

Behind every choice of methods lies an understanding of the nature of the world and in what way we should study it (Moses and Knutsen 2012). This chapter will first discuss the methodological foundation of this study and the research methods that have been used. Furthermore, it will touch upon the ethical considerations that have been encountered. It will be set forth that this research is based on a constructivist perception of performing research with attention for the significance of local knowledge and the uniqueness of context. Therein, the focus will lie on demonstrating local meaning-making in the case studies of Earth Haven Farm and Nordgard Aukrust. These are understood as two complementary cases within a comparative study that has the potential to inspire further research.

3.1 Methodology

Scientific knowledge is dynamic; it is constantly moving, changing and challenged by new research. As a starting point of the methodology that supports this research, I differentiate between scientific and indigenous ways of knowing nature9, in accordance to the book *Bridging Cultures: Scientific and Indigenous Ways of Knowing Nature* written by Aikenhead and Michell (2011). Aikenhead and Michell argue that, in the Euroscientific tradition, the myth of objectivity has been prevailing in our worldviews. Science ascribes itself an objectivity about anything. However, this objectivity relies on the idea that there is a reality outside us; that the questions we are asking do not interfere with the reality we ask about, and that the researcher’s intention is irrelevant. They further indicate a lack of acknowledgement of the elements of subjectivity existing in determining content validity. In other words, truth is perceived to be – to a large extent – subjective, as it is subject to human mediation10 (Aikenhead and Michell 2011, 1). Following this, the perspectives of the participants of this study will be put in dialogue with existing literary perspectives, to embed and interpret the obtained knowledge and increase content and constructive validity. Thus, the qualitative nature of the methodology of this research opposes natural scientific

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9 The scientific ways of knowing nature are understood as the more intellectual ways, the indigenous ways of knowing nature, then, are understood as more experiential.

10 In my personal understanding truth is the alignment of one’s thinking, speaking and acting. Proceeding this understanding, one can only be sure of one’s own truth.
approaches, such as the Galilean argumentation that only the measurable is real. Aikenhead and Michell point out that within a Galilean argumentation, there is a metaphysical assumption that everything that is worth knowing can be measured and quantified. Subjecting this quantification ignores everything that we choose not to measure or cannot measure. Subsequently, researchers choose not to measure the things that question the status quo or the institutions that are already in power. Moreover, this quantification eliminates uniqueness of relationships that cannot be characterized by numbers. Put differently, it depersonalizes knowledge that we gain (Aikenhead and Michell 2011, 53-54) and thus leaves out a lot of things that give meaning to our lives. For instance: beauty, sacredness, levels of intimacy, feelings of belonging, the authenticity of our communication, Self-realization, etc. In this way, scientific ways of knowing have incorporated an immense alienating power. Have we mistakenly tried to objectify, analyse and manipulate a living planet, and subjected it to our insatiability, as if we are not a part of it?

Now, my intention is not to reject Eurocentric science. It has taught us a lot about how the world functions, yet it tends to segregate aspects out of relationship. Aikenhead and Michell state that it is important to shift our perspective from one where two knowledge systems are mutually exclusive to one in which these are complementary (Aikenhead and Michell 2011, 18). With respect to this, I argue that for a more comprehensive and complex understanding of the world we need to unite intellectual and experiential knowledge. The aim of the methodological approach of this study, then, is to bridge intellectual and embodied knowledge in order to facilitate a new orientation and understanding of the multiple dimensions of spiritual ecology in the context of agriculture. This requires integration of rational thinking and those other subtle ways of knowing – sensual, intuitive and ethical – as set forth by Harding.

The analytical framework of comparative research provides a way of broadening our perspective through examining social and cultural differences and similarities of two separate phenomena with one shared cause. Each of these are to be studied within their specific cultural, historical and geographical context. The comparative approach of this research is asymmetrical, which indicates that the variables do not necessarily enable direct comparability. Indeed, in some cases I have chosen to emphasize conspicuous data in one case that is relatively less relevant in the other case. In this way, I have anticipated on the
relevance of unique findings in a specific context, rather than solely looking for similarities and differences.

This research will have both an intrinsic and an instrumental purpose. The instrumental value is to be found in the perception that the two case studies of this research are a part of larger, global processes that are connected to many other cases. However, the main focus lies on the intrinsic value of obtaining local understandings of biodynamic agriculture in the two case studies. With this in mind, the methodological approach of this thesis acknowledges a more place-based and experiential approach, adhering to the uniqueness of place and how the historical and cultural characteristics have cultivated these understandings. Hence, this thesis does not aim for generalizability and representativeness. Considered the challenge of meeting the high scientific standards of representativeness, I instead refer to Alex Steward’s concept of verisimilitude, which he sets forth in *The Ethnographer’s Method* (Stewart 1998). Steward gives preference to accurateness of description over generalizability. He argues that it is the job of the researcher to give continually critical reflections and updated accounts of observations and narratives gathered in the field. In spite of this, I posit that solely providing accurate descriptions is not enough. The empirical data must be positioned within a larger context. In this way, I hope the data and knowledge that will be generated through this research can be used to be compared to other cases. The theoretical relevance of this research can be found in the contribution it will make to existing research on sustainable agriculture and broaden our perspective on biodynamic agriculture and spiritual ecology. The newly gained insights that are set forth in this thesis can lead to adaptations and enhance innovative developments to improve current agricultural systems and community building.

### 3.2 Research Methods and Method Triangulation

Research approaches within the field of agriculture are gradually shifting towards a more participatory method that values collaboration, interpretation and engaging different forms of knowledge and data acquirement. In doing so, more attention is paid to a wider range of voices (Méndez, Bacon, and Cohen 2013). In acknowledgement of the importance of including these values, my research is based on ethnographic fieldwork. With respect to this, the main research method is participant observation, which aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the most fundamental processes of social life. Moreover, this provides a
more complete context for other research methods, such as different interview styles and critical literature review (Stewart 1998). Together, the ethnographic fieldwork, participant observation, and open and semi-structured interviews, are the foundation for an approach of method triangulation.

Participant observation has been a particularly important method, because it allowed me to learn about the ins and outs of the daily life of informants, and to integrate myself in the local community and build trust relationships with my informants. Neil Evernden claims that, in order to study experiences, one must become the experiencer of the experiences (Evernden 1985, 59). This indicates the largely experiential nature of my research approach. Through conducting extended fieldwork, I was not only able to obtain insight into the sensory rhythms, physical presence and practices at the farms, but also become – to some extent – the experiencer of these processes. I believe that first-hand and experience-near approaches are necessitated when one conducts a fieldwork on intersubjective perceptions of philosophical and spiritual matters. This is particularly important when searching for, and investigating, thick data (Geertz 1973). I am aware that the main critique on participant observation as core research method is the limitation of bias vision – *visualism* – and I will address the possible complications of this later on in the section on ethical considerations.

Aikenhead and Michell (2011, 89) argue that Eurocentric science is more ‘representative’ than ‘true’, and that truth is mediated by human interpretation and choice of method and methodology. Subsequently, it can be interpreted that the more viewpoints and ideas are included in the research, the richer the ‘truth’ will be. For this reason, I have tried to include as many voices as possible, through conducting sixteen in-depth interviews, aside from the daily conversational contact. I have used open, unstructured, and semi-structured interviews. I started with open and unstructured interviews, because this allowed interviewees to provide data that I may not have had anticipated on in advance. Further on in the research, I started using semi-structured interviews, in cases where I considered it important to fill up gaps of information. Intensive engagement with the participants and carefully listening to, and conversing with, my respondents has helped me to learn about their everyday experiences. I perceive experience-near fieldwork to be crucial to deepen the understanding of how individuals create space for reconnection with the community and the environment. Throughout my research, I followed an actor-oriented approach
through focusing on the experiences and perspectives of local actors (Aikenhead and Michell 2011, 70), whilst acknowledging, and with appreciation for, the significance of local knowledge and understandings of biodynamic farming.

It is relevant to note that I have chosen to discuss only few of the interviews in-depth in the empirical chapters, because both the space within this thesis and the timeframe of the overall project did not allow thorough discussion of all sixteen interviews. However, the ones that are less present in the presentation of my research findings have still been relevant for a deeper understanding of the data and for the overall analysis.

In short, the abovementioned research methods have enabled me to gain intellectual and experiential insights in the day-to-day life and labor at the farms. These include sensory aspects of perception and its relation to experience of place, social cohesion, identity development, etc. My methodology and methods do require an analytic perspective, which has been set forth in the theoretical framework. The literature study, then, is understood as the intellectual aspect of this study.

### 3.3 Data Processing and Analysis

During my fieldwork, I started with active participation in the field and conducting interviews. After the physical farm work, I took time to write down head and jot notes into expanded fieldnotes. Thereafter, I listened to the recordings of the interviews and transcribed them in NVivo. Finally, I coded all the research data. The most apparent codes I used were: biodynamic agriculture (general), nature connection, community, Self-realization, spirituality, CSA, education, childhood, health and case-specific codes. The importance of taking all these steps may be neglected or underrated by some scholars, but they have proven to be very valuable. The multidimensional process of data acquisition and computing has helped me to more thoroughly understand the obtained data input.

The empirical chapters are divided in two parts: one on my case study in Canada, and the other on my case study in Norway. I have maintained the same structure in both parts, based on the 3 dimensions that I have set forth in the theoretical framework: nature, community and the individual Self. I used part one to accurately describe my first experience, including initial impressions, concerns and conclusions. Preserving an element of surprise, the second part offers both data presentation and reflections on the first case study. By providing a
recurring pattern of data analysis, whilst embedding critical reflections and comparisons, my intention is to keep both the understanding and the interest of the reader.

A research on deep and embodied experiences, and the meaning-making of these, necessitates a writing style that can communicate the data most accurately. For this reason, I have chosen to combine abstract and speculative writing with a phenomenological style, which is particularly present in the presentation of the empirical data. Phenomenology moves away from a focus on observing a certain reality or perception of reality, to a focus on the meaning of the experiences of this reality (Evernden 1985). It is descriptive, narrative, participatory and personal in nature, and emerges from direct experiences and encounters in the research field (Mueller 2016). Martin Lee Mueller beautifully writes that ‘the attuning which phenomenology strives for is a participatory process not only between the phenomenologist and the world, but, importantly, between the phenomenologist, the world, and the reader’ (Mueller 2016, 63). Thus, to be able to create a more complete representation of the empirical data and the period of fieldwork, I included sections in italic which embody personal reflections, contemplations and experiences.11

In short, the chosen research methods contribute to a deeper understanding of local meaning-making inherent in a research context, and of the perceptual engagement of the research population with both their mundane and transcendental environment.

### 3.4 Ethical Considerations

I do not neglect that there are limitations to the chosen research approach, as I am aware of the scale of this project. It is important to realize that every claim made has limiting conditions (Booth, Colomb, and Williams 2003, 127). As already mentioned, it is not the intention to make claims about what is true or not true. Instead, my hope is to shed a new light and offer new perspectives on current debates concerning the paradigms of spiritual ecology and agriculture.

In every research project there are ethical issues to be considered. Thus, I will address the most relevant considerations. First, people who choose to be involved in AFNs, such as

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11 The interplay of my own experiences and perceptions with those of the participants suggests an element of intrinsic meaning-making present within the chosen writing style of this thesis. This, however, will remain incomplete until a third actor, the reader, notices it.
CSA and biodynamic agriculture, are most likely people who are already considerably environmentally conscious. I have therefore paid attention to staying aware of the following questions: What are the limitations of this? And how can the wider community be reached and inspired to develop their environmental consciousness?

Second, notions of informed consent, privacy and confidentiality should be taken into account. The topic of my research is not sensitive, neither does it involve a vulnerable research population. I have been up front about my role as researcher during my fieldwork. Moreover, I have chosen to code the names of the participants to maintain anonymity and privacy. Another pitfall when studying different cultures is stereotyping. Stereotyping can be reduced when one acknowledges the diversity of and within each group, and when one perceives statements as indicative rather than prescriptive of the research population. Finally, I consider it of great importance to mention that every researcher has a biased view to some extent. I have tried to deal with this challenge through applying reflexivity. I have done this throughout the whole research process to enhance a more nuanced understanding of complex issues and supports a critical analysis of bias (Sultana 2007). I am aware that a researcher can never be fully objective, but through the reflections of my personal fieldwork diary on how my own background and biases influence the research (meta-notes), I believe that I have been able to limit the impact of bias on the data collection and analysis. This is another motivation for the decision to integrate parts of my personal notes in the empirical chapters.

Having discussed the preliminary proceedings of fieldwork methodology and challenges, I have now arrived at the contextualization of my two case studies, after which I will present my research findings.
4. Context

This chapter will give a broad overview of the history of agricultural systems in Canada and Norway. It further discusses current developments and challenges of the movement towards more sustainable approaches to agriculture. Finally, it introduces the two biodynamic farms that are central in this research: Earth Haven Farm and Nordgard Aukrust.

4.1 Canada

The quest of European colonialization to spread Christianity, and gain power and land-ownership overseas, resulted in indigenous peoples being chased off their lands, boundaries being measured, fences being erected and forests being cleared (Zinn 2015). However, place-based cultures are inextricably connected to their unique environment, and they have developed experience-based knowledge of the land across transferred from generation to generation.

Instead of learning from the native people about the characteristics of the land, the settlers forcefully took control over nature. It is argued that the recognition of indigenous knowledge is an important and legitimate source of understanding the physical world (Palmer 2006). The various indigenous groups understood that they relied heavily on the land for their existence, and thus treated it with care and responsibility. Moreover, the native agricultural traditions incorporated spiritual components in their way of working with the land (Aikenhead and Michell 2011, 11). For example, the Native American calendar celebrates the times of sowing and the first harvest with the powwow, their original dance.

Let us now consider the current agricultural paradigm. With an increasing attention for the susceptibility of food production to climatic variations on the international level, Reid et al. (2007) note that, in Canadian agricultural policies, there has been an agreement on general approaches to agricultural vulnerabilities and adaptation strategies. However, they argue that the agricultural sector in Canada has yet to become a priority item. Today, Canada is one of the larger agricultural nations, with Ontario as center of production (Hall and Mogyorody 2001). A stronger focus on expanding sustainable approaches to
agriculture, and specification of these, is highly important. With regards to this, Hall and Mogyordy (2001) performed a case study on organic agriculture in Ontario, in which they underline that there still is a dominant presence of conventionalization in the management of agricultural land. Nevertheless, they have found that organic farming is on the rise. Since the early 1970s, there has been an active organic sector. However, despite its growing presence today, Hall and Mogyordy demonstrate that the overall share in food production translates only in a small amount of 1.5% of the total cash receipts (Hall and Mogyorody 2001). Additionally, in the article Farming in 2031, Van Bers and Robinson (1994) argue that alternative approaches to agriculture, such as ecological farming, CSA, biodynamic farming, etc., will be essential for conservation of a healthy soil and to maintain self-sufficiency agriculture in Canada in the near future. Both Hall and Mogyordy, and Van Bers and Robinson, underline the necessity to increase the numbers of the abovementioned alternative approaches to conventional agricultural systems. On a final note, Van Bers and Robinson state that the main challenge lies in discovering whether alternative approaches to agriculture will be sufficient in meeting the demand.

This concise introduction provides a broader background for the case study at Earth Haven Farm in Canada, and I have now arrived at contextualizing the farm itself.

4.1.1 Earth Haven Farm

Ontario is known for its agricultural landscape, lakes and vast forest areas. Earth Haven Farm is remotely located in the municipality of Tweed, which is approximately 200 kilometers from Toronto. The area mainly consists of large pieces of farmland with manors and barns. There are little signs of industrial practices, and there is barely anyone on the road due to the low population density.

The family-owned farm came into being in 2006. It is run by Emrick and his mother Maelie. The farm has held a Demeter certification since 2008. Demeter is a global certification system for biodynamic agriculture and has reached 45 counties. The certification is assigned based on a set of criteria, such as: a farm’s functioning as a living organism, biodiversity, soil husbandry, soil quality and abstention of use of chemicals, pesticides and genetically engineered organisms. The Demeter label derives its name from the Greek goddess of agriculture and fertility (Turinek et al. 2009).
Earth Haven Farm is nestled peacefully and harmoniously in the green landscape, and sunlight peeks through the cloudy sky. A small road, with on the left side a thin line of trees, leads up to the farm. On the right side lies one of the vegetable fields. The estate of approximately 200 acres looks like something straight out of a fairytale. It is surrounded by forests and conservation land, and in the late summer season, the fields are flourishing in a vast panel of green colors.

The first building that rises above the fields is a large white building: the main house. Behind the main house is the outhouse with a compost toilet. Inside the main house there is a living room, an office with an internet connection, and a kitchen with a large dining table. The upper floor is used for sleeping areas. On the right side is a new-looking building, the Earth Haven Learning Center\textsuperscript{12}, with a beautiful picture on one of the outside walls. The picture sketches a green, hilly landscape, wherein Scottish highlanders are grazing. In the front of the picture a flock of chickens is given a place. The picture clearly illustrates the farm itself, as it is the home of a cattle of Scottish highlanders, chickens, dogs and cats who are wandering around the compound. Inside the learning center, there is a large kitchen where, as I would find out later, the CSA boxes are prepared and produce is processed. Oppositely form the learning center there is a greenhouse that allows them to grow crops for which the outside temperatures are too low. Next to the greenhouse is a blue, hippie-style trailer\textsuperscript{13}. It has windows on three sides that allow a fresh breeze to flow through the rooms. Finally, there is a large barn with an open front.

Earth Haven Farm strives to be largely self-sustaining. Emrick and Maelie have installed solar panels, and on the compound there is a well which provides the farm with fresh water. Emrick and Maelie also constructed a basic recycling system for the materials used on the farm, which consists of a fairly long line of boxes. The people who live and work on the farm are conscious about their water and electricity usage. For example, shower routines are limited to one or two shower sessions a week. Naturally, most of the food that is consumed is home-grown. The left-over produce goes to the animals and green waste goes onto the compost heap, which then will be returned to the soil.

Emrick’s father is native American, with roots in the community of the Mohawks. Emrick is strongly driven by his native roots. The connections to his cultural heritage and the land

\textsuperscript{12} Appendix II.E: Image 1.  
\textsuperscript{13} Appendix II.E: Image 2.
are close to his heart. He feels a strong responsibility to steward the land of his elders and tries to integrate traditional farming approaches of the native people. The Mohawks adhered to a 'food is medicine' attitude, and the people of Earth Haven Farm try to honor this heritage by producing high-quality, nutritious and healthy food that is grown with care. Emrick expresses to have always been intrigued by the native side of his family. It is – in part – this cultural and historical background that has inspired Emrick to practice biodynamic farming. His own words describe this most accurately:

Biodynamic farming was something that I was interested in because I could not access the wisdom of my people, or find an elder who was willing to teach me about herbology and gardening. So, how would I learn to be able to respect what I am standing on, and pass respect that on to the next generation, and be able to build that balance between a plant and a human? How would I learn to understand my relationship to nature?

This last question is the starting point for the first empirical chapter of this thesis, which aims to attain insight in how the human-nature relationship is understood by the people of Earth Haven Farm.

4.2 Norway

Norway has a large variety of landscapes, which urges farming styles to be adapted according to the environmental circumstances. Many parts of the country are characterized by vast mountain landscapes, that often led to farms being quite remote. Traditional Norwegian farms were small, family-owned plots of land with a small amount of cattle. Farming activities were usually combined with hunting and foraging. Family farming is still commonly practiced in Norway, although the participation has decreased and part of the income is generally earned by off-farm work (Bjørkhaug 2012). Until today, mountain farming is an integral part of Norwegian agricultural traditions. During the summer season, farmers make use of the seter or sœter, which is a little settlement in the mountains that enables farmers to utilize grazing areas that were not part of the year-round habitation (Eriksen and Selboe 2012). Another factor that strongly impacts Norwegian farming tradition is the climate and weather conditions. The long winters make it difficult to solely practice vegetable farming (Eriksen and Selboe 2012). On top of that, the short summer season is relatively work-intensive, and produce grows quickly during this period.
During and after the industrial revolution, modern or conventional agriculture also found a place in Norway. This led to the use of chemicals and fertilizers. However, Norway is one of the few European countries where the development of agriculture is heavily regulated by the state through both economic and legislative instruments (Forbord, Bjørkhaug, and Burton 2014). Nevertheless, conventional farms were growing significantly and the compensation to small-scale farmers weakened, which led to a shift from traditional land-ownership to a predominantly rental land-management, and an ongoing movement of small-scale farmers away from their farmland (Forbord, Bjørkhaug, and Burton 2014).

Today, Norway faces diverse challenges in its management of both agricultural land and the wider natural landscape. The Norwegian Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) states agriculture does not solely fulfill its primary role of producing food. Beyond this, it lies at the intersection of food security, conservation of the land, agro-biological diversity, preserving cultural heritage and the general well-being of people, animals and nature. All of these components are known to be a part of the trajectory of sustainability (Bjørkhaug 2006).

One of the key challenges of agricultural management lies in its relation to natural and cultural heritage. Daugstad (2008) remarks that Norway attracts a lot of nature-based tourism, due to its magnificent landscapes with vast forest and mountain areas, and the many national parks. The combination of natural and historical landscapes is an essential asset for rural tourism. The challenge arises to limit the consequences of increased tourism, such as waste and disturbance of wildlife, and focus on how tourism can be put to use for sustainable management of natural resources, as set forth by Fredman et al. (2010, 2012). Daugstad et al. (2006) have further studied the role of agriculture as upholder of cultural heritage in Norway. They argue that cultural heritage is strongly connected to agricultural practices. They critically point out that agriculture can both support preservation of and threaten cultural heritage. On the one hand, agricultural activity influences sites and areas. On the other hand, it provides experience-based knowledge on land and resource management (Daugstad, Rønningen, and Skar 2006). Daugstad et al. demonstrate that agriculture aids in conservation of the land, whilst contributing to economic activity. They further showcase how small-scale Norwegian farms represent the image of traditional and authentic farms in ‘wild’ environments, which uphold long-held traditions. In this light, the farmer is perceived as bearer of traditions and knowledge.
Subsequently, the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) and the Norwegian Farmer’s Union (NFU) are placing a higher value on the farmers’ experience-based knowledge with the perspective of regional and sustainable development of land management in Norway (Daugstad, Rønningen, and Skar 2006). In addition to this, the MoA and the NFU now cooperate with the Rural Tourism Association (RTA) and the Norwegian Tourist Board (NTB). Their collaboration aims at sustainable management of the land and maintaining the image of Norwegian farms which should offer 'authentic experiences' to tourists, whilst mitigating negative effects of tourism (Daugstad, Rønningen, and Skar 2006).

With the increase of discussions on the current environmental challenges, organic farming and other AFNs, such as CSA and biodynamic agriculture, are on the rise in Norway. In the late 1980s there was a relatively small number of about 20 organic farms. According to a survey of Bjørkhaug and Blekesaune, this number has grown into approximately 2800 certified organic farms in 2010 (Bjørkhaug and Blekesaune 2013). Bjørkhaug and Blekesaune state that the current goal is to get organic production and consumption in Norway to reach the level of 15% by 2020. However, this shift is not yet happening fast enough.

4.2.1 Nordgard Aukrust

Nordgard Aukrust is a farm in a little town called Lom, in Oppland, which is located at the end of Gudbrandsdalen. From the road one already gets a charming few on the multitude of brown log farm buildings, varying in size. Beneath the compound runs a river, from which the water springs out of the mountains of Breheimen and Jotunheimen National Park. The wooden buildings are seemingly small amidst of the high-rising mountain tops, and the view is somewhat humbling.

Goran, the owner of Nordgard Aukrust, runs the farm with his wife Marte, their five children, and seasonal interns and helpers. The farm is also home to cattle, pigs and chickens. During the summer season, the cattle is up in the mountain seter Ulvåt øvst in Bøverdalen. The farm buildings have each their own function: to provide shelter to cattle, to storage tools and produce, and to offer living quarters for the people who live on the farm. Furthermore, the farm has a café, which is open throughout the summer, and offers space for community events and workshops. Down at the river side, there is a large field for the crops. There is a small road leading up to the farm, with alongside a flower garden.
On the backside of the farm there is a fruit tree yard and a couple of large meadows. Here, the landscape becomes steeper as it moves along the mountain side.

The farm was ecologically approved in 1986 and also holds a Demeter certification. They were the first organic and biodynamic farm in the area of Gudbrandsdalen. The farm itself is named after Olav Aukrust, who grew up in Lom. He was a poet and, as he called it himself, a mediator of spiritual inspirations. Olav Aukrust and his wife Gudrun were inspired by Steiner’s philosophy of life. Through their Demeter approval, the owners of Nordgard Aukrust carry on this philosophy. Goran further considers running an organic and biodynamic farm as a continuation of traditional agriculture, rather than a new or emerging approach to agriculture. Similar to Earth Haven Farm, the people from Nordgard Aukrust perceive it to be their role to take care of the land and the surrounding nature, and preserve the quality and vitality of the soil.

After having ploughed the soil of this research through exploring existing literature, and set forth the 'gardening tools' in the methodology and methods chapter, in this chapter I have provided historical perspectives on agriculture and contextualized the two case studies. I have now arrived at the presentation of the empirical data. The next chapters will take you on a journey of sowing seeds for different ways of knowing nature, and growing an understanding of experiences and meaning-making processes in biodynamic farming practices. Finally, new insights will be harvested and handed to you in the discussion and conclusion of this thesis.
5. Part I: From Experiential to Intellectual Ways of Knowing Nature

Upon boarding my plane, I feel – as I like to call them – travel tickles in my belly. The flight to Toronto is approximately nine hours and I am happy that I brought a book in my hand luggage. Reading Stephan Harding’s book Animate Earth, which is dedicated to the Science of Gaia, feels strangely familiar. Harding portrays our planet as Anima Mundi, a world with a soul. The planet is set forth as a living being and not an inert, dead mechanism (Harding 2006, 30). It makes me reminisce on my childhood, when I regularly felt an unease in my relation to my environment. It took me a significant amount of travelling and wandering across the globe to find my home in Norway. It was only then that I realized what I had been missing: a living landscape. Like many other children, I grew up in a very much designed and constructed landscape. The park-like green areas – which I used to consider forests – now seem not more than a collection of trees. They are merely planted in straight lines and serve the purpose of comforting people during their Sunday walks when they go out to catch a breath of fresh air. I imagine that these parks barely manage to in- and exhale in alignment with the breath of the Earth. Little do they absorb of the polluted air from the urban surroundings or provide shelter for wild animals. Yet, I do not intend to disregard the natural qualities of these areas, as I have come to realize that every tree, every plant and every teaspoon of soil, holds space for more life than many of us can even imagine.
5.1 Dancing with the Cosmic Rhythms of Nature

This first empirical chapter explores the ways in which the people of Earth Haven Farm understand and practice biodynamic agriculture. Thereafter, it will discuss how working in and with nature on a biodynamic farm creates space for deep experiences of the aliveness of our natural environments, and the interconnectedness of all living beings. Deep experiences of this connection hold the potential to open a new realm of meaning. With regards to this, I will discuss how the people at Earth Haven Farm understand and give meaning to their connection with nature. Along with these deep experiences come new reflections, realizations and questions regarding the ethics and values that they hold towards nature.

A fresh breeze flows through my room, and birds singing to the first rays of sunlight are slowly waking me up. I look at my clock to see that it is only half past five in the morning, meaning half past eleven in Norway. It is a Monday, so I dive right into the work routine at the farm. We start the day with breakfast, and I am put to work. I do not want to constantly highlight my role as researcher, so I choose to leave my notebook in my room, roll up my sleeves and dive head-first into my fieldwork. It is late summer and thus there is a lot to harvest.

5.1.1 Soil and soul

When approaching the human-nature connection in biodynamic agriculture, it makes sense to start where life begins. While I am digging my hands in the soil and feel the dirt getting stuck under my nails, I breathe in the sweet and sour smell of the earth. I see Emrick’s tall physique walking across the field, dressed in earth tones with a shirt hanging loosely around his lean body. Anyone could recognize him as a farmer. He approaches me to check up on how I am feeling. After I reassured him that I am well, he gives me a brief introduction about the role of soil and soil management in biodynamic agriculture. Emrick starts telling me about the constant interaction of symbiotic relationships between the organisms living in the soil, and how they form a digestive system aiding in decomposing organic matter. He describes how he has learned to appreciate – the verb enjoy may be an overstatement – the dank scents of soil that signal the composting earth. In biodynamic farming the soil is sacred and understood as the foundation of all life. He tells me that in order to maintain a high soil quality, they make their own preparations based on Rudolf Steiner’s instructions.
The most commonly used preparations are known as B500 and B501. I ask Emrick about
the universality of the biodynamic preparations and the possible implications of the lack of
availability of certain components in other parts of the world. Thoughtfully he replies that
it is first and foremost about learning to listen to what the land tells you is needed, and he
explicates: ‘Biodynamics is a way of life in which you cannot become disconnected from
the land.’ He further exemplifies this by stating that a farmer can try to plant a vegetable
somewhere, but if that spot does not have the right moistness of the soil, or the right amount
of sunlight, it will not thrive. Emrick tells me that the try to listen to their own intuition and
work creatively with the land. However, they do adhere to Steiner’s teachings as much as
possible. It would be only later in my research that I would find out that there are
biodynamic farms that do not so specifically follow the prescriptions, but indeed understand
it more as a guideline and vision of how to work with the natural environment.

When most of the harvesting is done, Hjalmar and I go to the barn to bag garlic. Hjalmar is
one of the interns who has been at Earth Haven Farm since early spring. He is wearing a
cord pants with a button-down shirt with rolled-up sleeves. The braiding of his hair with a
shaved undercut give him a somewhat Nordic look. On one of his arms he has a tattoo of
Vegvisir, the Viking compass, which symbolizes protection and guidance. When we climb
up the ladder to the attic, I see that there are long lines crossing the roof space, along which
the garlic is hanging to dry. The floor is covered with straw and we make ourselves
comfortable in a cross-legged position. I find the aroma of the straw soothing and take a
moment to observe the barn. Hjalmar has brought his speaker and turns on cheerful, but
slow-beat Indie music. The garlic bagging is not so work-intensive and thus allows space
for conversation. Hjalmar tells me that he attended the workshop on soil microbes that
Emrick and Maelie had organized in early spring. At that time, he had been impressed by
the magnificent complexity of the soil, and he tells me:

To even imagine the number of microbes and different mycelium in the
ground, or the amount of life in a teaspoon of soil, if that is not connecting,
I do not know what is. With this I came to realize that even in a relatively
domesticated space we can find wilderness.

Whereas he aligns a lot with the biodynamic way of working with nature and connecting
to the land, he also takes on a slightly critical attitude towards Steiner’s prescriptions of the
biodynamic method. He expresses this as follows:
I think there is a lot of emphasis on a Eurocentric standpoint. By Rudolf Steiner evidently, because he was born in Austria and lectured mostly to Europeans. I do not know of him travelling to faraway places, such as Australia, India or Canada. Perhaps he had mentors in those places. In any case, the biodynamic approach is ultimately created by Europeans for Europeans. We can see this most clearly in the preparations. I have seen these challenges in, for example, the fauna and flora of India. In such areas, people try to bring the 7 essential herbs of biodynamics into exotic tropical and equatorial zones, or even sub-Alpine regions. Or, when we look at Northern Russia or Canada, certain trees like oaks, or plants like horsetail and nettle simply do not grow there. Instead, these areas are covered by boreal forests. Steiner often speaks about healing the world, which carries a lot of responsibility and scope, but if one speaks of a global scale, one needs to incorporate the uniqueness and the diversity of the world.

In spite of his initial critical comments on the specificity of the preparations, Hjalmar expresses that he enjoys learning about the biodynamic approach. One of the things that stands out to him is the biodynamic perception of the ways in which plants and animals are dynamically involved with human ecology. Interestingly, he does not perceive this as a new perspective. He exemplifies his statement by summing up some ancient cultures who used herbal and plant preparations in their land management, such as the Mayans, Hindus and Egyptians. Based on this, he concludes for himself that biodynamic agriculture is not a 'New Age' shift in agricultural technique, but rather a revival of consciousness of working with the land and using the nutrition that already exists in the natural life cycle to enhance vitality of the soil. This approach counteracts exhaustion of the Earth’s soils.

The topic of soil vitality comes up repeatedly in my conversations with Maelie, who describes the vitality of the soil as follows:

It is understanding that word vitality that they use in biodynamics which has a very different definition from what the rest of the world understands when you talk about vitality. Most people think about vitality in terms of energy: the food has a little bit more energy. They do not really think about nutrition. However, when we speak about vitality from the biodynamic perspective, it is about how the produce is infused with the farmer’s intentions and personality. The vitality is derived from the energy that the farmer puts into the food, plus the elemental beings, the land and the soil. This is the whole farm concept. This is why there is a higher level of vitality in biodynamic produce.
From the conversations with my respondents, I recognize a common understanding that all living beings are interconnected through the dynamic flow of energy in nature. This understanding is derived from the esoteric aspect of biodynamic agriculture.

From all the people of the farm, Maelie seems to be most precise in following Steiner’s teachings. Maelie has taken the biodynamics course in 2008, and together with her colleague, she has created an impressively detailed planting calendar. The planting calendar assigns certain days that are beneficial for the planting or harvesting of leaf or root vegetables. When I think about how the moon cycle influences water, such as ebb and flow, it seems only logical to me that plants, too, respond to gravitational attraction. The upward growth of stems and the downward growth of roots are known as gravitropism: the external stimuli of gravity (Blancaflor and Masson 2003, Molas and Kiss 2009). Yet, without delving too deep into the complexity of astrological planting, in the light of biodynamic farming, it is important to at least make a brief note of it. Like Emrick, Maelie explains that biodynamic farming is first and foremost about tuning in to the living landscape of the farm, and this includes adapting to the seasons and the astrological cycles. The yearly seasonal cycle is a cycle of constant regeneration of nature. Maelie speaks with more enthusiasm in her voice when she tells me about how the farm changes throughout the seasons. One of the things she really enjoys is that, at the end of the season, everything goes back to just being her and Emrick on the farm. In the four months of the winter break they can reconnect to living off-grid. She underlines that this entails reducing their overall consumption, adopting a weekly shower routine, and re-focus on the core intention of their work. This is their moment to – just like nature – withdraw their attention within and slow down their pace of life.

Also of interest is the emphasis Maelie lies on the importance of slowing down and reflecting on her values and intentions. She explains that when she is in the city, it strikes her how fast-paced life has become. People are always in a hurry, always stressed, always occupied. She even experiences this in conversations; when she speaks to youths, she often must ask them to slow down. Maelie points out that when people speed up, they no longer pay attention to their environment. Moreover, she talks about how we have become surrounded by a multitude of billboards, signs, phones, etc. that tell us that we need more things, we need to buy things, or we need to dress a certain way. ‘In a way’, she says, ‘we are continuously told that we do not have enough: not enough things and not enough time.’
Nevertheless, Maelie argues that whatever we do or whatever we buy, we are left with a constant feeling of lacking something. Yet, she believes that many do not know what it actually is. She emphasizes that the continuous battle for more money, better jobs, more expensive phones, cars and fashion has created a culture of competition and separation. Conversely, the farm teaches her to slow down her pace of life. Maelie explains that when she slows down and takes a moment to simply breathe, there is a little moment of silence. ‘It is in these little moments of silence’, she continues her story, ‘there is space for the realization that we do not actually need all of the things we think will make us happy. Happiness comes from within.’ Happiness, in her opinion, comes in those moments when she steps away from all the distractions and sees how rich life is: ‘The hard-to-pinpoint emptiness that many people feel, can only be filled up by the non-material and non-measurable. And thus, fulfilment can be found in nature and in spending time with loved ones.’ Maelie finds this on the farm, which she perceives to be a place where there is no lack of time, nature or resources. Alternatively, the farm is a place for experiencing nature and being fully present in the moment.

Nonetheless, it has become clear to me that running a biodynamic farm does not come without challenges, especially those regarding the limited frontiers of economic resources. Maelie explains to me that the economic situation is the biggest challenge for the farm. Her face turns grim and the tone of her voice lowers when she says that even out on the farm, she experiences moments of restraint and stress. Despite the hard work, their debts remain or even grow, and they struggle to keep their heads above the water. Maelie exemplifies this by telling me that they barely earn a dollar a day. She says that it is important to note that the farm still exists within the structures of society and that they are bound by financial obligations, certifications, legislations, etc. Similar to Maelie, Emrick also expresses frustration and doubt about the financial circumstances. He tells me that the financial pressure causes him to consider quitting: ‘Not quitting working with plants, the cattle and the land, but quitting farming as a business.’ Be that as it may, he underlines that these considerations only come up occasionally. Generally, the passion he has for his work prevails. Despite the hard work and the tough financial situation, it appears to me that they are not driven by financial benefits. Instead, what keeps them going is the meaningfulness of their work.
5.1.2 Living in living landscapes

Clear in each of the descriptions above is the way in which the respondents speak of nature as a living entity, which is to be treated with care and respect. Highlighting the experiential nature of her relationship to nature, Maelie tells me that she experiences a sense of aliveness when being out in the garden, or out in nature in general. She illustrates this by saying: ‘When one claims that a natural environment feels alive, this refers to something beyond the immediately visible environment. It articulates an underlying spirituality in nature.’ Moreover, she states that it is exactly this spiritual aspect that makes the biodynamic farm stand out from other alternative approaches to agriculture. She specifically explains to me that it is more than rational knowing of her being part of nature, which she described as follows:

In nature there is an intimate relation that is formed phenomenologically. It entails experiencing the seasons and the changes of weather; to walk outside and feel that it is going to rain, without listening to the weather forecast. When you immerse yourself in that, it is experiential, not intellectual.

As for myself, Maelie’s words describe quite accurately how I feel when we spend the whole morning out in the garden. While I am hopping around on my flipflops in the sunny weather, I feel like a child full of wonder about all the different shapes, sizes and colors of the vegetables. One of my favorite tasks on the farm is picking beans. Although it seems an endless job, I enjoy sitting on my knees on the ground and with my hands in the green. Once started, I experience it as a meditative practice. Meanwhile, I try to open my senses to the garden. A gentle breeze teases my nostrils with mixed scents I cannot quite distinguish. The warmth of the sunrays strikes my cheeks and my fingers cautiously maneuver through the fragile branches of the bean plants. I feel like an explorer, searching for hidden treasures. Halfway the line of bean plants, I find myself in the shadow of the sunflowers that offer shelter from the heat that shimmers from the sun. Their flowers face east at dawn to greet the sun in the morning. As the sun travels westwards, they slowly turn to follow its course.

Yva comes to help me picking. Yva is the CSA manager of the farm. She is my age, 23 years old, and lives together with her mother on a farm nearby. She grew up with farming and gardening. After her studies on Indigenous Peoples and Environmentalism, she started to become more conscious about the historical roots to the land, her own connection to it, and the responsibility to take care for it. I get to know Yva as a very kind and honest person,
with a lot of humor. The fact that we are of the same age and have similar academic interests most likely plays a role in the development of a new friendship. Since my arrival on the farm, Yva has been very helpful and patient with my lack of knowledge about farming. Oppositely to me, picking beans is not her favorite task. Nonetheless, she tells me that she finds comfort in the mundane practices on the farm. She states that many people are resistant to exactly these tasks that make us feel connected to nature, and she tells me:

We must learn to find fulfillment in the simple things in life. Gardening is one of those things. It is easy to take physical contact with nature for granted, but it is not so common anymore. The hard work on the land makes our lungs swell and our muscles tense. It is an ongoing exchange of chemical metabolism, both inside of us and in interaction with our surroundings. We must not underestimate the power of reconnecting to nature with our breathing bodies.

She smiles when she points at my dirty feet. I tell her that many people laugh at me because I like to walk around barefoot and feel the fresh green grass tickling my toes. She nods her head and says: ‘Yes, exactly! Even the smallest acts and sensations can expand our experiences.’ Yva points out to me that many people speak about nature as if they are not part of it. She admits that before her study she, too, had a more separate view of herself and nature. On the contrary, she now sees herself as just another little component. This change of understanding made her more conscious that every action has a consequence. She exemplifies this by telling me that whenever she buys something, she chooses to support a certain brand or business. Thus, it is important for her to know more about how and where food is grown, and the distance it travels. Her life is now more based on trying to respect the earth, instead of trying to get a job and make money. She admits that it is not always easy, but she wants to live in one place and live as sustainably as possible. I ask her why biodynamic farming stands out to her specifically. After a short silence she admits that she cannot relate to all aspects of biodynamic farming and she finds it hard to describe it accordingly. She explains to me that organic agriculture is more abstention of the use of chemicals and hormone treatments. Biodynamic farming, besides the extra components of the elements and astrology, is also about intentions and mindfulness. She expresses to have a lot of respect for the people at Earth Have Farm, and she says:

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14 Appendix II.E: Image 3.
They are really dedicated and put in much more than only physical work. The people here aspire a better way of being and living with the Earth. This is what I try to do as well. It is an awareness about the whole-cycle concept: what we put in the earth affects what we take out of the earth. In essence it is about being aware that our actions have consequences, beyond our direct vision.

She further explains that when people have a better relation to the land and if they understand how much they rely on the land, they would treat it better. ‘We have to teach people that there are alternative ways of managing the land, instead of jumping to chemical solutions.’ Yva underlines that biodynamic farming aims to tackle this feedback loop and bring back the inherent regenerative ability of the soil.

The evening sky turns to all imaginable colors of dark blue, with hints of pink and yellow. I am sitting in the trailer with Hjalmar, resting from the intensive work, and we light up the oil lamp. I have noticed that Hjalmar is more a ‘deep-diver’ than a small-talker. Thus, I feel free to open conversation by asking how he has come to feel closely connected to nature. He tells me that he finds his place in the world mostly by being all by himself out in nature. This is when he is most in his comfort zone, when he can perform ancestral activities, such as: gardening, tending to the animals and foraging. Hjalmar is fond of an outdoorsy lifestyle and has travelled all around the world to work in exchange for accommodation and food. He tells me that he grew up in the North of Canada and lived his childhood in the forest. Surrounded by nature and animals, this has set very deep roots in his persona and he always felt a deep fascination for his grandfather’s farm. Other than that, he explains that he had an ordinary coming of age, and – in his opinion – a fairly boring timeline in between his teenage years until he learned to find his own identity as a young man. From the age of fifteen he started spending a large part of his time in solitude.

I ask Hjalmar what has driven him to come to Earth Haven Farm, upon which he starts telling me about the long winter he spent in the North of Canada, before coming to Earth Haven Farm. He describes how the ground had been fully covered in snow for four to five months and he had not seen any greenery during this period. The desire for the therapeutic feeling of seeing green in the landscape is for him an ancient feeling. The desire to experience the bloom in the spring, and – in his words – the connection to the fertility goddesses. Hjalmar’s mantra is ‘to keep moving and sowing new seeds.’ He tells me that the seeds he is sowing today are always propelling him to new heights of experiencing life.
He has not stayed long enough at a farm before to see all the seasons pass. So, he tells me that Earth Haven has allowed him to land in one place, from the moment where the world is covered in snow, the sprouting of seeds, until the colors change on the trees and the season is dying. On the farm he gets to experience the crops going off the land when the cold days are starting, when the frosts arrive, and the ground locks up and nature goes to sleep.

He underlines that the seasons are a cycle of constant regeneration. Personally, he experiences his stay at the farm not solely as a work experience. The Earth’s seasons mirror the movement of internal seasons in himself. It is a movement that brings light, growth and warmth back to his heart after a long, cold and fairly isolated winter. He reminisces on the long periods he spent alone in the North of Canada:

> Throughout my transition to adulthood, I started to see the land as a place with magic and spirit. I lived many years of my life without constant companionship, other than what I would find in nature, and I felt no need for relationships outside of myself with the natural world, or beyond female companionship. I felt that nature was my wife.

I am fascinated by his experience of his connection with nature. Authors such as Næss, Harding and Abram have argued that deep experiences of working in and with nature can give a profound sense of interconnectedness. Likely, it is difficult to be instilled by these realizations, in the way Hjalmar describes it, if one only touches upon a piece of land whilst being on their way elsewhere. One must experience many seasons in the same place for the senses to more subtly trace the changes in nature.

I come to understand how the long periods of time Hjalmar has spent alone in wild nature away from distractions of designed environments, allowed him to deepen his connection with the natural world. It stands out to me that the development of Hjalmar’s understanding of nature quite finely follows the Næssian argument. He elaborates on his experience of his connection to nature:

> Until recently, people have always been able to exist in natural, undomesticated habitats. Yet, many have become unaware of the importance of rewilding our spirits and tending our innate wildness. First, we must unlearn the unsustainable habits that we have inhabited. Then, we must re-learn to immerse into the boundless beauty of this world and to not be afraid of this wilderness. My connection to the land only brought light upon
ignorance on these things that were already apparent. I had to learn a lot of this on my own. I perceive it as a subjective ontology that cannot be taught or demonstrated by external sources. Rather it must be realized within the self. This, however, can take a life time, or it can happen in the course of an afternoon in the garden.

Without Hjalmar mentioning Næss’ deep ecology, I find a lot of parallels to his ecosophy. The expression ‘I perceive it as a subjective ontology that cannot be taught or demonstrated by external sources. Rather it must be realized within the self’ is very much in alignment with Næss’ notion of Self-realization. It is interesting that Hjalmar remarks that a connection to nature cannot be taught, but I may learn more about this further in the research. Another point that stands out to me is his statement that the development of this connection is not related to a specific amount of time. As he says, some might take many years or will never gain deep experiences, while others can find it in the simplicity of mundane tasks and moments. Harding speaks of this, opposing Næss, when he explicates deep experience does not necessitates the isolation of an individual in nature (Harding 2006).

I wonder to what extent these deep experiences of nature have led Hjalmar to question modern paradigms of alienation from nature. Thus, I ask him if, in any way, this has led him to contemplate on the prevailing ethics and values regarding nature. He replies to this as follows:

I think the main problem has to do with our relationship to the Earth, which has moved to a rather disconnected bond with nature. It is a very Western mindset that got us into this position. If we do not see ourselves as being a part of nature, we start to devalue and abuse it. I believe that agriculture has always grounded us. It represents a transition from when we were nomadic gatherers and hunters, to settling on a piece of land with good soil. We used to live without our high-tech machines, weather forecasts and the ability to shelter ourselves in climate-controlled conditions. Instead, we heavily relied on the land.

Hjalmar’s way of speaking is profound and poetic, and I feel as if I can keep listening for many more hours. Confidence shines through his answers, as I notice little hesitations during our conversation. He does not withhold any critiques on prevailing attitudes of

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15 I have chosen to refer to literature only to a limited extent in the presentation of the empirical chapters. On the one hand, the references are reminders of previously introduced themes. On the other hand, they highlight interesting linkages, which then will be further analysed in the discussion chapter.
people towards nature. Yet, his answers apply to a more general vision on the human-nature relationship. I gently stir the conversation in the direction of biodynamic agriculture specifically, and ask him how living and working on the biodynamic farm has contributed and changed his experience of nature. His short answer is that the simple effect of staying in a place for a longer time, and allowing yourself to love a place, makes you notice and appreciate the little changes. Hjalmar tells me: ‘When you tune in to a place over time, you start noticing the first days the leaves change on the trees, you see the first days when the apples are ripe, and the berries are the juiciest, or when the last frost leaves the ground.’ He elaborates on this by saying:

Living biodynamically with the earth, and engaging our stewardship, is an acknowledgement of the complex relationships within the life cycle, as well as our responsibility to take care of them. On a biodynamic farm, nothing is quite what it seems; the fresh manure in the fields that are casted out from the cows to the earth is the future soil that will nourish orchards of fruit trees, crops and herb gardens. It will nurture the high grasslands that will, once again, feed the cows.

Hjalmar understands stewardship as a willingness to listen to – and serve – the land. Despite the critiques on the concept of stewardship that I have set forth in the theoretical framework, the term is regularly used at Earth Haven Farm to indicate people’s responsibility to take care of the land.

When I joyfully frisk into the garden, I find Yva planting seedlings of lettuce and paksoi. I join in on the work and she starts telling me about seed saving. She explains how farmers gather the best seeds after the harvest, with the purpose of preserving them for a successful growing season in the next year. I realize that I have never pondered on how the seeds came into being, how they carry such a great potential for future life inside, and at the same time hold a genetic memory of the past. While our hands move from the seedling tray to the lane of soil where we are planting, we come to talk about this life force. I look up for a moment to swipe my hair out of my face and see Hjalmar’s physique emerging above the vegetable field. When he approaches us, he asks what we are discussing. We give him a brief update, upon which he notifies us that farming really is all about sex. For a moment, my eyes widen in surprise. In his words: ‘Everybody is obsessed with sex, even if it is about flower sex, or pumpkin sex’. He points out that this realization comes about when one actually takes a conscious moment to sit down and watch the bees impregnating vegetables by spreading
the floral semen or performing mating dances on sunny days. This is how life becomes embodied: in the beautiful, entangled, interconnected webs of symbiotic life. He further explicates:

I used to think that nature was something that would be met, that we would go out and visit nature. Yet, the more time I surrounded myself with nature, the realization came that I am also this nature; that I am the trees and the trees are in me; that I am the sky and the birds and the rocks and the rivers. Simply by sitting in nature, meditating or working, one realizes how interconnected everything is. So, the shift of consciousness came from a presence within my own nature. It is the bioregionalism of living and loving in one place that draws us closer to the center in our own souls.

At the same time, he says that not many people are aware of this. Hjalmar critically addresses people’s dependency on lust and materialism, which are imposed on them in the modern world. In his opinion, the illusion is created that we need more than we actually do to sustain life. This is especially the case in urban areas. These desires reach far beyond the primal needs of warmth, food, safety and love. Conversely, he believes that the rare truths about life are to be found in these simple things. He invigorates these statements with a more descriptive illustration:

Experiencing the complete lifecycle on the farm brings a certain re-enchantment of life. It is magical to see life sprout and grow, and eventually die and withdraw back into the soil. This gives an immense awe, respect and gratitude. The reality is that these enchantments are easily forgotten when one lives between brick walls and habitually buys ready-to-eat meals.

Hjalmar perceives biodynamics as a framework that allows farmers, and people working with the land, soil and animals in general, to envision a sense of ritual towards everyday tasks. He explains that this allows the farmer to infuse the sacred into the mundane. Steiner talked about this as a way of seeing the spiritual and the profane, and seeing a spirit in every practical act (Steiner 1995). This, again, reminds me of Stephan Harding, who acknowledges that one can have deep experiences is everyday activities and does not need to withdraw from society for an extended period of time. I find that the people who live and work at Earth Haven Farm live very much by this principle of finding joy and satisfaction in performing everyday tasks. For example, Andras, another intern of the farm, had told me earlier that day:
The farm work is something that makes me feel really connected to nature. When I am outside, working with bare hands in the soil and pulling up weeds, that is the moment I recognize what grows. It is all the little, mundane things, such as looking up at the sky and seeing a hawk, or watching the weather as it changes from day to day. These experiences ground you, because it makes you feel like a small part of this larger whole; one little person out in the dirt.

This set aside, Hjalmar continues to tell me about his experiences of nature. He states that a sense of connection and belonging to nature unites the wide variety of spiritualities across space and time. Ancient cultures have always found meaning and supernatural power in nature. He speaks of ways in which nature spirituality can be evoked through shamanic rituals, hallucinogens or simply through immersing oneself in the wild. These experiences transcend any particular sensory modality that forbid premature closing of our perception of reality. He recommends a book to me called *How to Change Your Mind*. The author, Michael Pollan, argues that consciousness is primary to the physical world. Subsequently, he states that it precedes it: ‘Along with feeling ineffability, the conviction that some profound objective truth has been disclosed to you is a hallmark of the mystical experience; called the noetic quality’ (Pollan 2018, 41). This relates back to Næss, who advocates that immersing oneself in nature can bring similar experiences (Naess 1989).

Over the course of weeks, I have found that for the people of Earth Haven Farm biodynamic farming is a way of caring for the land and reviving a connection with nature. Throughout the conversations that I have with Emrick, Maelie, Hjalmar, and others, I start to realize more and more that a close relationship between humans and animals, or humans and plants is not a New Age trend. Historically, many place-based cultures have had close connections to nature. And thus, it seems rather a revival of this connection than a discovery. Living with the rhythms of nature raises awareness on the aliveness of landscapes, and that there is so much more that we do not perceive in our daily life. This strong focus on working with the cosmic rhythms and forces of nature is particularly interesting, because it indicates both the elements of the living (bio) and the energetic (dynamic) parts biodynamic farming.

The previous section has shown that the practice of farming in general can be understood as an embodied connection to nature. I have found that the sensual experiences of the

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16 It is interesting to highlight the way Hjalmur speaks in plural terms about spiritualities. The deep ecology movement conceives that many philosophies are in close contact with one another. Arne Naess discusses this in the apron diagram, which illustrates connections between a wide variety of views (Naess 1995).
garden, the soil, the fresh air and the surrounding forest give a tremendous reverence for all living beings – whether visible or invisible for the naked eye. Moreover, these experiences lead the people at Earth Haven Farm to reflect on their position in the world and, in the light of spiritual ecology, their ethical position towards it. Their deep experiences of nature have led them to cultivate an attitude of care and responsibility for nature. Based on their own experiences, the participants of this case study have the intention to inspire other people to rethink the way they produce and consume food, and the consequences of this for the natural environment. The next chapter will explore how the people of Earth Haven Farm connect and reach out to the local community through the means of the local food network.
5.2 Local Food, Local Engagement

The fact that we rely on food to survive connects us physically to the produce we consume and the soil it is grown in. Simultaneously, research has provided evidence for the potential of agricultural systems to develop integrated communities that are centered around food, and a shared identity as eaters (Sharp, Imerman, and Peters 2002, Brehm and Eisenhauer 2008, Macias 2008, Ravenscroft et al. 2012, Russell et al. 2013b). Undeniably, a community is important for the simple reason that people are social beings, and look for a shared identity and a feeling of belonging (McMillan and Chavis 1986, Fiske 2009).

Researcher and senior lecturer Christine King (2008), specialized in community resilience and natural resource management, writes about reconnecting people with food and people with people in alternative agricultural systems. She argues that alternative approaches to agriculture such as biodynamic farming, farmers’ markets and CSA, aid in creating a supportive relationship between the community and farmers (King 2008). King further emphasizes the importance of developing this relationship to enhance awareness of the consumers on the consequences of means of food production and consumption. Accordingly, sociologist Clare Hinrichs (2000) argues that reciprocity, community and education should be become more embedded in agricultural systems. She stresses the importance of developing a sharing relationship between the farmers and consumers, regarding knowledge, experience and food (Hinrichs 2000). In short, gardening and farming can enhance the building of social networks and social capital. With this in mind, the following chapter explores the experience of human connections and how these play a role in the food system.

Throughout my stay at the farm, I, too, am on a path of experience, questioning and insecurity. I do not only feel more and more integrated in my natural environment, but also in the social environment. Over time, I develop closer relations with the people around me. What a wonderful thing it is to connect to like-minded people and develop mutual learning relationships, intellectually and experientially. I experience it as a process of cultivating common ground; each individual with a rich history and vast collection of meanings and interpretations, yet ploughing the same fields. I come to wonder how we can expand our communities and involve more people in this communion of sharing?
Over the course of several years Emrick and Maelie have developed multiple gateways to engage with the community, for example: by implementing the CSA model, attending farmers’ markets, and through the Earth Haven Learning Centre. They started the CSA about 3 years ago, with the intention to connect to the community and inspiring them to live, eat and consume more consciously.

When it comes to the CSA, Yva is my key informant on the farm. When we prepare the CSA boxes in the kitchen, I ask Yva to explain to me how the CSA at Earth Haven Farm works. Although I have gained a significant amount of knowledge on the general functioning of the CSA-model throughout my literature research and my internship at the Centre for International Climate and Environmental Research in Oslo (CICERO), I also know that the model can be applied in differing ways. Yva tells me that the farm has about 22 CSA members this year. The food boxes are sent out on Tuesdays, and sometimes there is an extra round on Fridays. On the CSA days, the mornings are used for harvesting and cleaning the produce for the box scheme of the week. Once all the produce is ready, it is divided over the boxes. There are different box sizes available with varying price ranges. Yva explains that the sizes make the CSA more accessible for either people who are alone or for bigger families, as well as it creates the opportunity for low-income families to join the CSA. Later in the afternoon, the food boxes are driven to different pick-up points in the area. Yva shows me the record she keeps of what goes into the boxes every week. She tells me that she finds it important to please the members, and therefore she tries to keep the boxes diverse and interesting. The factors that decide what goes into the food boxes depend on, for instance: the seasonal vegetables that are ready to be harvested, the produce that was given the previous weeks, the quality of produce, and, at times, the preferences of the members. Besides the preparation of the CSA boxes, Yva is also in charge of sending out a monthly newsletter. The newsletter contains information about the development of the farm, the seasonal produce, events and workshops and a few recipes to help people cook with unfamiliar vegetables. The newsletter is not only informative, but also aims to make people feel more connected to the farm where their food comes from. I am impressed with her structured work approach. She cares about the CSA and its members, and clearly puts thought in putting the boxes together. I ask Yva what motivates her to run the CSA, to which she replies:

17 Appendix II.I: Image 4.
The CSA provides the bridge between the ones who have taken up the archetypes of farmers and stewards of the land, and those who perhaps cannot afford to do so, or in this time of their life chose to live in an urban area, or those who are simply not growers themselves.

She further underlines that CSA does give people a different connection to their food. The produce they receive in their box is not by their choice. It is a gift that stimulates them to learn how to use different vegetables that they might not be familiar with. This has two sides to it. On the one hand, some people enjoy the challenge and the wide variety of produce. On the other hand, there are people who dislike certain vegetables or fruits, or are simply not open to try new things. The latter are people who often do not stick around for more than one season. I ask her if she notices a specific demographic group that remains member of the CSA. She tells me that, whereas the members have all different kinds of backgrounds and professions, reaching from teachers and gardeners to business developers, she does notice that many of them are older in age and like to support young local farmers. Admittedly, she adds to this that a couple of the members are friends of her mother. Naturally, they have a more personal connection to the farm, and to Yva’s family. They know about the financial struggles of the farm and hope to help them by participating in the CSA.

We are still out in the garden, when Yva catches me a little off guard by telling me that her mother, Marian, is coming to pick me up. Her mother has arranged interviews for me with some of the CSA members. I have learned by now that doing fieldwork and participant observation requires flexibility. Thus, without hesitation, I run inside to pick up my notebook. Once in the car, I cannot help but smile. I am so thankful for the openness of all the people on the farm, and their willingness to help me with my research. During the car ride, Marian tells me about the importance of her relationship and cooperation with Earth Haven Farm: ‘I experience the importance of having someone you can count on, and I think it is one of the things we have to learn, because the individualistic model is not sustainable.’ She further speaks of her arrival in Tweed as a young woman and how she had expected a close connection between neighbors in the countryside. However, with a sad expression, she tells me she was wrong. Many people do not even know their neighbors. In spite of this, she has hope that the CSA will enhance connection in the community. I do not get the chance to go deeper into this, as we have arrived at our destination. Yet, I make a ‘head note’ to ask the people at Earth Haven Farm about this upon my return.
We stop at a charming house with a little veranda, and a beautiful garden with apple trees and all kinds of flowers. Marian tells me that this is the house of one of the CSA members. It is also the place where the CSA boxes are dropped off for pick-up. A lovely, elderly lady named Jeanne opens the door and welcomes us in. We are served tea with a gingerbread cookie and sit down in the living room. The room reminds me of an old library: the walls are covered with bookshelves, which rise from the floor all the way up to the ceiling and the seating area consist of a wooden table and a couple of fauteuils. The small windows only allow a little bit of light to enter the room. When we are all comfortably seated, I ask Jeanne what has motivated her to become member of the CSA. She starts a long story about meeting Marian, and the two of them feed of each other’s excitement while reminiscing on memories of their friendship. I hesitate to interrupt them, but when a moment of silence presents itself, I kindly guide her back to my question. She giggles and apologizes for the detours, after which she answers:

I think the reality is that most people with limited income will find it difficult to pay the money up front. Yet, for me, that is an important part of the CSA. We are taking the same risks that the farmer is at the beginning of the season. Paying ahead will help the farmer to do what he has to do. If it is a terrible year, you carry part of the burden. I think that is an important part of it. So, on the one hand, I would like to see more involvement of the people with lower income. The model of risk-sharing gives a sense of the burden with which farmer deals, to a little extent anyway…

Jeanne touches upon some of the primary drivers of the CSA model. Since Jeanne’s house is used as pick-up location, she has the most contact with the other members. She further tells me that a majority of the members join the CSA because they value getting fresh produce that has not been imported and crossed a long distance. Another key motivation is eating nutritious vegetables and fruits that are grown with care and love. When I ask her about the affordability of the boxes, she notes that the food boxes are a pretty good deal financially. Purchasing fresh and local produce can be quite expensive. Nevertheless, she does know people who do not want to join the CSA, for the exact reason that it can be hard for people to pay the complete amount up front. Therefore, it is most accessible for middle- or higher-income families. Jeanne tells me that the CSA inspires her to consume more consciously. She proudly shows me her reusable plastic zip bags, reusable lettuce bags and her compost system. She says: ‘I even give back the elastics with which the vegetables are bound together’. ‘So’, she concludes, ‘the cycle of reuse, reduce and recycle are really built
into the CSA system and make people think about it more.’ Jeanne gives us some of the bags to reuse for the next CSA.

After a cozy afternoon filled with conversations and English tea, Marian drives me back to the farm. Upon my arrival, I find Emrick and Yva in the kitchen. The dirt on their clothes makes me think they have had a long workday. I sit down with them and ask Emrick what his motivation is for running the CSA. He admits that if it was not for Yva, they would probably not do the CSA. He is too busy himself the cattle, the gardens and the farmers’ markets. The reasoning for a system based on a risk-reward model is strongly determined by financial benefits. Financial pressure is indicated as a major challenge for biodynamic farms. Subsidies generally go to large-scale and conventional farms and it is hard for smaller, alternative farm systems to compete and keep the price low. Every dollar that comes in has already been spent or must be spend immediately. Hence, the advance payment is a welcome income when investments need to be done in early spring. Aside from the financial benefits, Emrick does confirm to have the wish to enhance community development in the farm area, but this is not put on the first place. He once again expresses the intention to inspire people and raise awareness on qualitative, healthy, nutritious food and to share knowledge on the benefits of biodynamic farming. As I have experienced the long and hard-working days, I can imagine why he does not prioritize community development.

Emrick further notes that the financial challenge influences other limiting factors as well, such as promotion and obtaining professional workers to help on the farm. He explains that the lack of workforce and financial capability keeps them from producing more food for more people. In this light, it is currently not possible for them to make the CSA grow, even if they would gain more customers. Emrick has clearly illustrated the economic barriers they are facing. Following this, it is important to go deeper into the lack of professional workforce he shortly mentioned.

Since my arrival on the farm, I have sensed a slight bitterness Maelie’s voice during our conversations. During one of our talks, I openly ask her about this. She does not hesitate to confirm that my feeling is right and explains that over the years she experiences the same growing frustration throughout the season. The first factor is the WWOOF18 program. She

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18 WWOOF is a platform for World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms. Volunteers can find work on organic farms in exchange for accommodation, food and learning about farming: [https://wwoofinternational.org/](https://wwoofinternational.org/)
states that they need the WWOOF-ers to get the work done, especially during the planting and harvesting season, because they cannot afford to hire experienced farmers. However, she marks that the farm work, and farm life, does not come easy for everyone. Besides, she emphasizes that their remote and minimalistic lifestyle is something many volunteers underestimate: ‘Many volunteers have an ideal image of living sustainably, using a minimum amount of water and electricity and using a compost toilet.’ However, she tells me that, once arrived at the farm, many volunteers drop out early, leaving them without helpers. Maelie explains that she finds herself becoming more bitter and impatient over the years. Ultimately, the winter season always comes, and as she has mentioned before, she uses the quiet months to withdraw inside and remember her motivation and passion for the work and the farm.

5.2.1 Growing food, growing community?

As mentioned earlier, Marian touched upon the goal of CSA to connect farmers with consumers. However, after talking to the people at Earth Haven Farm, all of them admit to lacking a sense of strong connection to the local community: first, the distribution system is a limiting factor, because the CSA functions through a pick-up system; second, Earth Haven Farm does not require any voluntary on-farm working hours form the CSA members, which a common prerequisite in the standard CSA model. When I am working with Yva on the composition of the CSA boxes, she tells me that most of the members prefer a pick-up system because it is more convenient, due to the remote location of the farm. Another reason is that Emrick and Maelie value the intimate sphere of the farm, and thus they do not mind that the members do not come over to pick up their boxes every week. As a result, these two aspects limit the amount of personal contact. Whereas Emrick indicated earlier not to know any of the customers, Yva tells me that she does know a couple of the members. However, she says that it is not as much as she would like.

Later that day, I bring up the aspect of community development in a conversation with Maelie. She expresses that she wishes every day for more connection to the community. She tells me that Emrick would most likely say that they fail the community in a way. Conversely, she rather feels like the community fails them. They do the best they can, but with all the farm work and lack of finances to hire a good employee team, they simply do not have the time to reach out more. I sense a feeling of disappointment when she mentions
to experience a lack of interest of the people living in their area when it comes to knowing where their food comes from, and a lack of awareness of the amount of work that is involved with farming. She elaborates on her concern as follows:

Every night when I go to bed, I silently pray. The first thing I pray for is a connection to the community. In all the 12 years we have been here, I feel as if the community has not connected so strongly with us. We have tons of connections to the biodynamic community, but they are not in our backyard. We have not reached the level of community where Emrick can call the neighbor to ask for help if needed. That is why I feel like the community is failing us.

Apart from the lack of interest of the community, Maelie also experiences a lack of understanding when it comes to biodynamic agriculture. She tells me that she has the same conversations again and again, but the spiritual aspect of biodynamic farming remains hard to communicate to people who are more entangled in urban or conventional lives, with little interest for what lays beyond purely physical and intellectual ways of knowing. The latter comes as no surprise, as I cope with the same challenge in discussing the spiritual dimension of my research.

After my conversation with Maelie, I return to Emrick to learn about his perception of a sense of community. Emrick speaks of himself as an introvert person and who does not like to have people around all the time. He is quite attached to the farm as their private space. However, he would like to have a fixed day or evening once a month to get people more involved with the farm. He suggests community dinners, work events, etc. Emrick points out that they do organize a seasonal garlic harvest or garlic bagging event, which draws the attention of some people. Nonetheless, usually only a few people show up.

I learned from my conversations with Yva, Emrick and Maelie that it is important to note that community is not a one-way relationship. I asked some of the CSA members about their perspective on a possible increase of involvement with the farm. Some of the members express a desire to have more community activities, to get to know each other and connect with people who share the same visions. On the other hand, few others pointed out to be quite happy to not have more 'obligations' in their already busy lives. They enjoy the convenience of the CSA system the way it is provided now (Interview 8, Interview 9). Regardless the obstacles, I have found that CSA at Earth Haven Farm in Canada is successful in raising a certain degree of awareness on sustainable food production, health,
and connecting people to the food they consume. However, it may not reach a level of community development that CSA ideally strives for. Markedly, the CSA is not Earth Haven Farm’s only way of reaching out to the community. In the light of raising awareness about biodynamic agriculture and reconnecting people to nature, Maelie set up the learning center together with one of her colleagues. Here, they occasionally teach workshops on the diverse aspects of biodynamics, ranging from topics on the elementals, soil microbes to food preservation and recycling.

Maelie and I are sitting in the quiet space of the learning center for an interview. It is a beautiful room with two big bookshelves full of the teachings of Rudolf Steiner and other literature on biodynamic agriculture, plant imagination and astrology. Maelie tells me that the groups have been relatively small, but with the increasing attention for sustainability worldwide, more and more people become interested in alternative ways of food production. In the same way that the people at Earth Haven Farm raise awareness and provide information through the CSA and the newsletter, the Learning Centre predominantly is a place for mutual learning and knowledge sharing.

Along the same line, Emrick’s and Maelie’s attendance at farmers’ markets is also a way to engage with people and inspire consciousness about their consumer choices. Concurrently, the markets are a place where they can learn about the needs and desires of the customers. They take part in two different farmers’ markets, which both take place on Saturdays. Important to note here is that the markets are located in Toronto, which is a rough two-and-a-half-hour drive from the farm. Undeniably, this does not contribute to a closer connection with the local community. Nevertheless, Emrick and Maelie use the opportunity, on the one hand, to increase their income. On the other hand, they hope to raise awareness on biodynamic agriculture. Notably, both Emrick and Maelie pointed out to me to dislike extending the food miles of their produce, as well as the amount of petrol they use for the drives to Toronto. In spite of this, there are good reasons additional to their personal incentives, namely: studies show that farmers’ markets effectively showcase local produce and bring consumers together that are interested in seasonal and fresh products. Furthermore, it is shown that they aid in educating consumers about the importance of consuming locally. Another key point is that farmers’ markets provide an opportunity to reconnect urban consumers with both food and people from rural areas (Åsebø et al. 2007,
Brown and Miller 2008, King 2008, Turner and Hope 2014). Given these points, it seems worthwhile for Emrick and Maelie to attend the markets.

To get a better insight into the farmers’ markets, I decide to join Emrick to the farmers’ market at Evergreen Brick Works in Toronto. Evergreen Brick Works is located near the city center and attracts mostly tourists. Emrick tells me that he notices that the people at this market are less concerned with the food they consume. He exemplifies this with the story of a couple that passed by his stand. The woman asked Emrick questions about the vegetables, whilst the man asked his female companion if they could not just go and buy a burger. Emrick notes that these situations occur regularly. He hopes that people are aware of what they support when they buy products. I ask him what he thinks is needed to increase this awareness. His answer is short, but clear: ‘Education.’ He elaborates on this by saying: ‘Information is key when it comes to developing environmental awareness.’ This last sentence stands out to me, as I have found that the people at Earth Haven Farm, based on their own (deep) experience of connection with nature, try to inspire people through providing information. Nonetheless, it is interesting to emphasize here that there is a fine line between information and education. Sharing information is mostly intellectual, whereas education can be both intellectual and experiential.

This chapter began by describing the different ways in which the people of Earth Haven Farm reach out to the wider community. The informants of Earth Haven Farm express the intention to inspire people to eat healthy, local and seasonal food through the implementation of the CSA model. However, the connection to the near community remains limited. They indicate that they are able to reach more people at the farmers’ markets, yet their way of inspiring others remains largely intellectual, through sharing knowledge and information. Whereas there are critical points to be made on this approach, I do not intend to neglect its importance. In the section that follows, I will start by addressing the role education and childhood experiences play in developing environmental consciousness. Thereafter, I will present findings with regards to the process of Self-realization in farming practices.
5.3 Sowing Seeds for an Ecological Self

When one starts reading about the biodynamic approach and anthroposophy more generally, one cannot avoid bumping into the topic of education. Education is central in Rudolf Steiner’s teachings. Steiner argued that children's perceptions of the natural world are linked to imagination development and experiential learning. He describes children's way of learning as sensory-oriented. In this light, Steiner advocates for fostering an education system in an experiential and playful manner. He further argues that access to natural places and natural play activities both encourage a connection with the Earth and contribute to children's way of knowing. Conversely, when intellectual thinking is induced in children at an early age, without a significant time in a natural and experience-based learning environment, this affects their experiential learning. Consequently, multiple scholars have demonstrated that it is more likely children will come to think intellectually about nature, which forms an abstraction and alienation from the natural world (Harwood 1958, Steiner 1986, 1996, Wilson 1997). With this in mind, this chapter starts by discussing the importance of childhood experiences in developing an ecological Self. Thereafter, I will showcase the spiritual nature of deep experiences that stimulates one to develop an understanding of who we are and realizations about our place in the world.

While I am picking the fruits of autumn, high up on the ladder into the apple tree, I sense that I have come to see myself more and more as a part of nature.\(^{19}\) I feel like a little puzzle piece, with my own unique shape, yet fitting synchronically with the pieces around me. At the same time, the vastness, complexity and multitude of connections, cycles and processes are hard to grasp – and overwhelming at times. My mind becomes tense when my rational thinking takes over in trying to get a hold of it. When I notice this, I take a few deep breaths and allow my body to soften. Then, strangely, I realize that is exactly this vastness and complexity that makes life so intriguing and enchanting. I think for myself that it would be a pity if one was ever to lose the wonder-full-ness that captures young children. I remember how, as a child, I would pause any activity to count the black dots on a ladybug, or smell the exotic white blossoms of a magnolia tree in the heat of summer. Now, seeing children do the same meticulous things puts a smile on my face. Why should we ever stop being full of wonder about nature, life or even our own existence?

\(^{19}\) Appendix II.I: Image 5.
5.3.1 Children of nature

The importance of education became even more apparent during my visit to the second farmers’ market, which is located at the Waldorf school in Thornhill. Opposed to the visitors of the market at Brickworks, those who come to the Waldorf School are evidently more familiar with biodynamic farming and anthroposophy. The school has a beautiful architecture and is decorated with art works by the children. While Maelie takes care of her stand, I wander around and find a seat at a table. I buy myself a coffee and observe the people at the market. I notice many commonalities between the people walking around the market. For instance, many people are dressed in what may be described as alternative clothing: seemingly self-produced clothing in different colors of wool. The market stands contain all kinds of fruits, vegetables, homemade pastries and bread, kefir, bee wax candles and wrappers, superfoods, and knitted goods. It does not take long for someone to approach me and, before I know it, the hours pass by. I figure out that Maelie is sending people my way to talk to me about anthroposophy and biodynamic agriculture. Whereas I would like to elaborate on all the interesting conversations, I believe not all of it is explicitly on-topic. More important is my encounter with a man, Liam, at the anthroposophical bookstore near the Waldorf School. The principal of the Waldorf school recommended me to speak to him, and so I take her advice.

Liam welcomes me warmly and, despite the fact he is on his work shift, he makes time to sit down and talk with me. He starts off by telling me about his background. He has past experiences with working in biodynamic farming. Amongst other things, he has done biodynamic bee keeping. However, he is now predominantly involved with the anthroposophical community. He tells me that, as long as he can remember, he has felt a strong connection to nature. He spent his childhood running around in the forest. He specifically mentions this to emphasize the influence one’s childhood has on the development of this connection to nature. I recognize Liam’s remarks from the writings of Richard Louv, which I previously discussed in the theoretical framework. Liam’s focus on the way children grow up made it stand out to me that most of my participants indeed have either grown up with family members that were involved with farming or grown up in a non-urban environment.
Liam remarks that infrastructure – which he broadly interprets as ‘the way we structure our lives and the way we are structured by our structured environments’ – plays an important role in shaping us as a person. With regards to this, natural surroundings are a precondition. Subsequently, he argues that children’s development of familiarity with their natural environment, including all living beings, enhances connection to and identification with nature in their adulthood. Additionally, Liam makes a critical remark on the many modern school systems, which – in his opinion – still function as mere industrial systems, where schools function largely as information factories. This has led to what he describes as ‘an extinction of experience’. For this reason, he considers it of great importance to include nature-experience in the education system, such as is done at Waldorf or Steiner schools. He calls this 'living learning'. Living learning allows space for creative, playful and natural development. On a concluding note, he says:

It is essential that people – whether children, adolescents, adults or seniors – revive the understanding that it is nature in which we are rooted; it is nature that nurtures us and makes us grow. It is nature to which our bodies return, providing nourishment for new life. In essence, we are all children of nature.

These last words would keep echoing inside of me for a still undefinable amount of time.

5.3.2 Being alone or being all-one

When I am out in the garden with Yva, we come to speak about the sensation of the earth between our fingers. We have our hands in the soil and mud under our nails. The humus smells sweet and sour and has a dark black color. Yva points out that it is especially the mundane tasks that some people would be reluctant to perform, that make us feel connected to nature. Simple things, such as digging in the soil with bare hands, pulling up weeds, learning to recognize what grows, etc. She explains that spirituality helps to understand the importance and meaningfulness of simple and everyday things. This is first and foremost what connects us to our environment.

Maelie speaks with more confidence and details about spirituality. In her understanding, the meaning of spirituality is to be found in experiencing a sense of belonging, a sense of being fully present. She recaps something that she had told me earlier: the importance of slowing down and living in the moment. She adds to this:
Spirituality is a sense of beingness and universal love, which leads to feeling intense gratefulness for life. For instance, the farm teaches us about life and death. On the one hand, through the seasonal cycle of the plants. On the other hand, through the life cycles of the farm animals. Above all, the farm teaches us what it means to be human.

Her last sentence strikes me, and I follow up on this by asking her what it means to be human for her, to which she replies:

What it means to be human? It means to get a sense of being a part of everything, that we are star-seated in universal love. We all have our own journey to get a sense of understanding who we are and to experience all that is part of existence.

What stands out to me in my conversation with Maelie is that spirituality is not about having a certain philosophy or following intellectual or rational thinking. Rather, it is an experiential and liminal process of identification and self-development, a process with a vast richness of meaning.

Before breakfast, Hjalmar and I spread out our yoga mats on the grass behind the trailer. Hjalmar holds a slightly different understanding of spirituality compared to Maelie, and his words describe the following:

Spirituality is an understanding that we are not solely our bodies or our thoughts. It helps us to see the bigger picture, and deidentify with the idea there is only physical existence. I think that spiritual experiences lie beyond the scope of human and cultural symbolism. For example, the way we construct language as a paradigm of a society, such as the way we speak English, or German, or French in certain places. These are symbolic constructs that we use to communicate. Conversely, spirituality goes beyond the construct of language and its limitations. That is to say: it can be shared by everyone. Spirituality has no language, no form, no religion… It is like the sun, and the same sun shines on everyone.

I am not in a position to make value judgements on his visions, but I find the descriptiveness of his words understanding profoundly intriguing. I decide to move away from the definition of spirituality as a concept and ask him how spirituality can contribute to understand our relation to nature. Similar to Maelie, Hjalmar starts off by drawing attention to the meaning of being human. More importantly, he is more elaborative on the experiential, sensual and embodied nature of humanities existence, in a way that I consider it of importance to be illustrated by his own words.
We are born with about 16 trillion cells in our body that do nothing else but feel. Sensation is our first imprint when we are born. In other words, we are not a Buddhist, a Christian, a doctor, a teacher or a student. When we are born, we have no other identity than simply being human, within the Earth community. Then, we are born in a sensual world and we learn to use our senses to explore the different ways in which we can interact with our surroundings. It is a very subtle way of interacting with the world. However, when science started to induce a more intellectual and rational worldview, many lost the sensual experience of the world. Perhaps the way back, for those who have lost that connection, is to revitalize their subtle body, and experience the world less through the mind and more from the heart. I believe that immersing ourselves in nature can remind us of our interconnectedness with nature.

From his words I interpret that we are not overseers of nature, but we are participants of this more-than-human community, which reminds me of Berry’s concept of communion. I also draw here on the concepts of Self-realization and contemplative ecology, as discussed in the theoretical framework. What the participants describe as a sense of beingness and immersing oneself in nature to experience the interconnectedness with the natural world reflect quite accurately what Arne Næss and Douglas Christie speak of. Seemingly, this signposts empathic identification with nature and the development of ecological awareness. Clearly, the farm work allows the people at Earth Haven Farm to deepen their physical contact with nature. The practices of working with the hands in the soil, and using all the senses to experience the natural environment, allow the spiritual connection they experience with nature to become embodied.

Finally, Hjalmar points out to me that human sentience still belongs to the physical realm, and that spirituality is a way of transcending the physical world and the limitations that it entails.\textsuperscript{21} He continues by emphasizing the following:

\begin{quote}
Nature simply is. Nature never pretends. And so, when we are out in nature, we can truly be ourselves. This takes away the pressure that many people feel to always do something, or the expectation of acting or dressing a certain way. It is in these moments, when people feel free from the limitations of society, that people can connect and experience, not only nature, but also a sense of Self. It moves from the perception of being one, alone, to being One, by means of all-one. This awareness of unity can make one both ecstatic and terrified. That we find ourselves unfolding, and fully embedded
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{21} It stands out to me that Hjalmar explicitly uses the word ‘transcending’, which implies that spirituality, then, is not directly visible or physically detectable. His words can be interpreted to suggest a clear distinction between the physical and spiritual dimension.
within nature’s mystical community, in which our individual perception of Self dissolves.

With these words, Hjalmar comes full circle. I started off in the first chapter with exploring the perception and meaning of the human-nature relationship. Thereafter, I set forth the connection between people. Now, having discussed the spiritual aspect of nature, I have arrived at the level of the individual. I have found that on the individual level we come to deep experiences of people’s relationship to nature. Both Maelie and Hjalmar have described that people develop a better understanding of who they are and gain a certain awareness of their relation to nature, when they experience it. Naess discussed this process in terms of Self-realization. He argued that deep experiences of nature enable the realization that all life is interrelated. This realization enhances integrity between human and other-than-human beings. Subsequently, Naess argued that individuals will naturally develop environmental ethical behavior or deep commitment (Naess 1987, Talukder and Hossain 2016).

Drawing back upon the threefold cycle of deep experience, deep questioning and deep commitment, I believe that we can find a disconnect at Earth Haven Farm. It has become clear in this chapter that the farm is a place where one can have deep experiences. Nonetheless, Emrick’s and Maelie’s way of communicating their own experiences beyond their farm remains largely intellectual, as they try to inspire people through promotion of biodynamic farming and questioning conventional agriculture and consumerism. This may raise concerns about whether people may not become more inspired through gaining experiences themselves, rather than hearing about them. I have experienced the general atmosphere at the farm, to some extent, to be private. To exemplify this further, I refer to the way Emrick described himself to be quite an introvert person. At this stage of understanding, I wonder if an increasing focus on individual and spiritual development does principally require one to withdraw from the distractions of society, as Naess has argued. Could it be criticized that developing an ecological Self comes at cost of connection to the community, or will it – at last – benefit the larger whole, perceived that the world is indeed an interconnected web of all living beings?
6. Part II: From Intellectual to Experiential Ways of Knowing Nature

I would describe my stay at Earth Haven Farm as truly enchanting and inspiring. My research was going smooth and I felt confident about writing my thesis and carrying out the inspiration that was sparked in my heart. Still, the farm image seemed quite idealistic. As a researcher I felt a slight hesitation about sketching a perfect image, especially after having read a significant amount of criticism on biodynamic farming. So, it happened that I came to ponder about how to increase credibility and critical analysis of my case study. I decided to add a second case study and put them together in a comparative context. I did not have much time to arrange the unexpected continuation of my research. Yet, with dedicated effort and some luck, I was able to find a second biodynamic farm, Nordgard Aukrust, that was willing to welcome me on a short notice. I rescheduled my flight and went back to Norway a little earlier than I had initially planned. I had one day to do some laundry and repack my backpack, before travelling to the small, rural town Lom in Oppland. Upon boarding the bus, I felt a slight irony about the situation. I remembered my teenage years when I was quite shy. Looking at myself now, I wondered what I had gotten myself into this time. Being a researcher, you must be flexible and create conditions for a flow to happen, and then flow with it. Thus, once again, I was on my way to a completely unfamiliar place, whilst having invited myself into someone’s home for my research activities. I smiled, with mixed feelings of curiosity and an expectation that this would be a significantly different experience from my case study in Canada.
6.1 Rooting in Nature

The chapter that follows demonstrates how the participants from the case study at Nordgard Aukrust understand their relation to nature, and how this influences the way they perform biodynamic farming practices. It will become clear that the farm is perceived not solely as a place of food production, but rather as a place where nature can be experienced. Whereas their practical implementation of biodynamic agriculture is less apparent, the ethical position they conceive relies very much on the biodynamic principles.

I arrive in the little town of Lom in Oppland. When I step out of the bus, I find myself in one of the most beautiful sceneries I have ever seen. I can hear the river flowing through the valley, which is still green. The mountain sides are colored with a vast panel of autumn colors, and especially the birch trees add a golden glow to it. Above this, high mountain peaks are rising, already covered with snow. I find a freer beauty in the roughness of the landscape. Upon my arrival on the farm, I get my own room in a small, wooden building. It is a charming place to stay. There is a staircase leading up to a small door, and I have to bend down to get through. The room is simple; there is a bed, a desk and a small fireplace. The wooden design reminds me of the typical Norwegian hytte, and I am pleased.

I am still feeling jetlagged, as I have only left Canada three days ago, and a little tired from the seven-hour bus travel. Despite this, I immediately join in on the farm work on my first day.

It is half past seven in the morning, and we go out into the garden to harvest vegetables for the weekly orders. While I am harvesting fresh parsley, dill, coriander and apple mint, I can feel my fingers getting stiff and turning a little blue. I soon understand that I will need gloves for the outdoor work. In spite of the cold, I am filled with a sense of wonder about the view on the majestic mountain tops around me.

Already during my first day, I notice that the biodynamic approach is not as clearly visible here as at Earth Haven Farm. I cannot help but feeling slightly concerned. Yet, I decide not to draw premature conclusions before my first interview with Goran, the owner of the farm. When I carry the herbs into the storage room, I find him scanning a list of orders with his eyes. His tall body rises above a large pile of boxes full of produce. From the wrinkles in his face and on his hands, I read a life of hard, physical work. It is the face of a man who spent his life outside on the land, in gentle summers and in the cold winds of the winter.
Yet, the expression of his face is calm and warm. I ask him if he has time later in the day to talk to me. Knowing the purpose of my stay, he kindly agrees.

In the afternoon, we sit down in the farm café. The café is a suitable place for my interviews because of its silence and spaciousness, and it has a comfortable seating area. However, what is most delightful about the place is the view: one side of the café consists completely of glass, which allows an astonishing sight on the valley and the mountains. Although we sit inside, I still feel how close we are to nature, and I can almost feel the fresh breeze of the autumn wind.

After a short introduction from my side, Goran starts off by telling me about organic and biodynamic farming. The farm functions fully organic and holds a Demeter certification. Nevertheless, he does not strictly follow the biodynamic prescriptions. Goran is well-aware of the importance of soil quality, which is one of the essential criteria for the certification. Besides, he values the idea of the farm as an interconnected system. For this reason, he uses left-over produce to feed the animals and the manure of the animals to fertilize the land. Opposed to Earth Haven Farm, he does not refrain from buying and using external products for the farm, such as extra nutrition for the animals. Besides, less attention is paid to the usage of water and electricity. He makes a comment on the fact that the water comes from the river that flows out of the mountains. The water is of high quality and there is an abundance of it. It is valuable to have generous access to natural resources. When I ask him about astrological planting and the moon calendar, he firmly states that he does not use it and, in fact, does not really believe in it either. In response to my impression that biodynamic practices are the relatively little present here, I ask him openly about his understanding of biodynamic agriculture, to which he replies:

I am of the opinion that Steiner’s teachings and prescriptions of biodynamic agriculture are rather a guideline than a recipe book. Biodynamic agriculture, to me, is more a source of inspiration; it is not a defined way of doing things. Similarly, anthroposophy is a philosophy from which we can draw inspiration as well.

Interestingly, he starts off by discussing biodynamic agriculture from a critical standpoint. He argues that when we read texts of old philosophers, such as Aristotle, these philosophies are not directly applicable in every situation in today’s world. Along the same line, he

22 Appendix II.II: Image 1 and Image 2
argues, Steiner’s teachings are situated in the 1900s. Nevertheless, Goran affirms that – in a general sense – they provide beautiful guidelines. He further states that when it comes to biodynamic farming, people must find their own way and adapt to the natural surroundings such as vegetation and soil composition, climatic circumstances and available resources.

Goran continues by telling me that he has relatives that are involved with the anthroposophical community. He perceives himself to be quite a philosophical person. Subsequently, he has been interested in the big questions of life for many years. I ask him what the big questions in life are for him. He replies that these are the fundamental existential questions, that is: where do we come from? What is the meaning of life? And what happens when we die? He adds to this that philosophies such as anthroposophy address these existential questions. It is in its anthroposophical nature where we find the roots of biodynamic farming. Oppositely, organic farming does not involve philosophizing upon our place in, and connection to, the world around us. He states:

I think it is very much about our understanding of life I would say. And life is always in process, change and development. That is one very important point of anthroposophy and biodynamics. A dynamic way of thinking is more natural, like life and nature are dynamic, so should our thinking be. On the contrary, analytical thinking is more causal. Yet, in life it is not just one factor affecting another factor, it is always a complex, multi-dimensional and reciprocal situation. For this reason, I do not believe in making fixed definitions or categories.23

I am intrigued by the caution with which he chooses his words. He is very conscious about his statements and makes sure he puts his arguments into perspective. For example, he often makes a side note like: ‘it is complicated’, ‘this is individual’, or ‘it is context dependent.’ I have to encourage Goran a little bit more to answer my questions elaborately, upon which he continues by telling me:

I believe that this is a more physical and mathematical way of thinking, not the natural way of thinking. Returning to biodynamic farming, I consider it of great importance that a farmer looks at the farm as a whole organism. Farming and gardening are about treating many factors at the same time. As a farmer you must change the concept every day, depending on the

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23 I find it worthwhile to make a personal remark here, because I felt indirectly addressed by this last statement. Goran had pointed out to me that he thought my questions were quite broad and open to interpretation. I responded to this that I prefer to ask open questions to allow space for the interviewee to answer freely and not enforce a specific answer that I would like to hear. Yet, more specifically, I had asked Goran about his understanding and definition of biodynamic agriculture. He expressed that any definition would not be able to capture the complexity and holism of its approach.
conditions, such as the weather, and what is happening on and around the farm.

Even though biodynamic agriculture might not be so obviously present, Goran clearly adheres to biodynamic concepts in his approach to the farming methods. Brian Goodwin has argued that ‘we need to understand the subtle forms of interaction that hold together the fabric of the natural systems on which the quality of life on this planet depend. With this knowledge we can weave new patterns of relationship with each other and with the living Earth’ (Brian Goodwin in Harding 2006, 17). Similarly, Goran underlines that the essence of biodynamic farming is to learn to understand the interrelatedness and interaction of all aspects of the farm. In this light, he tries to work with the relationships that already exist in nature. He follows up with a critical note on conventional methods, which indicates his motivation for the biodynamic approach.

Conventional farms are often lured by the promise of large profit to manage the land in a rather artificial way in order to maximize its productivity. Instead of working harmoniously with the land to keep the soil nutritious and balanced, during the past centuries, farmers have drifted towards subjugating nature, rather than working with her.

Parallelly to the people at Earth Haven Farm, he emphasizes the importance of listening to the land and adapting to local circumstances by saying:

The farm exists in a certain surrounding; in a natural, cultural and historical context. For example, I am very much interested in architecture. In architecture we use a term called 'genius loci', which can be understood as location genius or location wisdom. You could say it is the spirit of the place. I believe that is our challenge, to creatively integrate general ideas into a specific time and place. In a way we incarnate ideas into the physical world. This is the power of man. We have the physical and creative ability to build something with our hands. We cannot do this by simply following a book with recipes. We must learn to listen to the place. In a way it is rooting and grounding yourself.

Goran accentuates that the best way of learning how nature works is by spending a longer period of time in the same place and observe the consequences of your actions. In this process, knowledge of the place becomes specialized knowledge. He states that: ‘This is the power of farmers, they really know the land.’ He continues by saying that he feels a strong connection to the land. He indicates that Norway has a vast variety of landscapes and he would not generalize anything to the national level. Rather, he connects to the
traditions and history of this specific region. He speaks about the strong agricultural history of this area, and explains that there have been farmers living here for about a thousand years. He illustrates this by referring to the well-known stave church in Lom. Evidently, stave churches were placed in holy places. The church is nearly 900 years old, and they have found the foundations of two even older buildings. So, he concludes that when they built the church, there must have been people here. In those times, most people were farmers. Goran tells me that this history increases his feeling of responsibility to take care of the land and continue the agricultural tradition. Farming is for him a way to steward the land in a way that will help to sustain the land, its cultural heritage and its agricultural purpose.

A point I had not considered before starting my fieldwork in Norway is the influence of tourism and on the use of agricultural land as cultural heritage. Considering the attractive location of Nordgard Aukrust in between Breheimen and Jotunheimen National Park, I ask Goran about his experience of nature-based tourism and its relation to the agricultural landscape. He explains to me that especially in the summer there is a significant number of tourists coming to Lom. The café at the farm is open every day during the high season and he declares that tourists come to visit the farm. Moreover, he affirms that this is indeed one of the reasons why it is important for him to take care of the land:

The local people in this area can be important actors in protecting the nature in this area. Most people who live here have strong roots, and their families have worked on the land for many generations. The Norwegian government acknowledges the importance of using this generational knowledge, which I believe to be important. Considered that we must take on a holistic approach, it seems only logical to me to establish collaborations between the agricultural and tourist industry.

Goran tells me that he does not have factual knowledge on how the collaborations are established. However, I have shortly addressed these in the context chapter, where I set forth that scholars, such as Daugstad et al., demonstrate that small-scale Norwegian farmers can be perceived as bearers of traditions and experience-based knowledge on land management. Whilst the people at Nordgard Aukrust are not actively engaged with these collaborations, he speaks of his role as farmer as caretaker of the land. And, in his own way, he tries to contribute to this to challenges that lie at the intersection of agriculture and nature-based tourism.
6.1.1 From beauty to duty

While Goran and I are still sitting in the café, I look out of the large windows to the mountain tops that peak above a multitude of red, yellow and brown-colored wooden farms that are located in the valley. Goran expresses that he is less concerned with presenting a traditional image of the farm. He notes that he builds and maintains the farm according to what he thinks is practical, useful and beautiful. For example, he is building a traditional Norwegian stone wall around the flower garden24, which gives the farm a charming sight. Pre-eminently, Goran’s intention is to increase the aesthetics of the farm, rather than pleasing tourists. The desire to create a visibly attractive environment around the farm comes up repeatedly while talking with him, and I ask him about his motivation to focus on this. His eyes light up, and for the first time my question seems to excite him. He replies: ‘I try to create a place where people can find inspiration. An important part of this, I think, is making something that is beautiful. Beauty is a great way of sparking inspiration and excitement in people’s hearts.’ Subsequently, I ask Goran why he believes beauty is important for humans, to which he answers:

Beauty begets beauty. It stimulates joy, creativity and care. If someone is in a polluted place, it is easy not to care for that environment, or even to add more waste. However, when a place is beautiful, one is more likely to want to preserve the beauty.

Similarly, scholars like Holmes Rolston (2002), Timothy Morton (2007) and Malcolm Budd (1996, 2000) argue that aesthetic experience of nature is a common starting point for environmental ethics, and preservation and conservation of nature. Rolston states that aesthetic experience of nature has two sides: one of detachment and one of engagement. The former entails utilitarian concerns and self-interest. The latter concerns immersion into the experience with all our senses. He illustrates this with the example that people may believe they observe a forest as a scenery, but a forest is often entered instead of looked upon. He writes: ‘Visual experience is critical, but no forest is adequately experienced without the odor of the pines or of the wild roses’ (Rolston 2002, 138). Whereas Rolston speaks here of something more than visual engagement, Goran accentuates beauty only. However, what unites their points is the understanding that being present with the place in

24 Appendix II.B: Image 3.
its beauty – through all senses – incites that sense of responsibility. This is what drives Goran to be attentive towards the aesthetics of the farm.

A sense of responsibility to take care of the land is an important factor of connection to the land. Implicitly, Goran had spoken of feeling connected to nature. However, I am curious to hear more about how what this connection means to him. Different from the people at Earth Haven Farm, Goran explicitly talks about anthroposophy and deep ecology, and he has been into environmental activism in the past and is familiar with the philosophy of Arne Naess. Goran confirms that farming enhances a strong connection to nature and the food he grows. The farm is a living landscape where spiritual intention and wondering meet with collaboration with the land. In his own words,

> It started with reading philosophical texts and engaging in environmental activism. This inspired me to question modern paradigms. However, through the work on the farm, my philosophical views become embodied in the incarnation of my intellectual knowledge and experience. Incarnation comes from the word 'carna', which means flesh. To in-carnate literally means becoming embodied in flesh. In this process, the ethical position I take towards nature takes root in the body of lived experience.

Goran provides me here with a new realization. In spite of my discussion of embodied connections in the theoretical framework, I did not yet go back to the origin of the word. Goran beautifully described the meaning of the embodiment of connection with nature. Whereas the people I talked to during my fieldwork in Canada were very open and elaborate about the deep experiences they have had while being in nature, Goran simply states that it is most certain that any farmer feels connected to nature; they rely on the soil, the seasons and are constantly exposed to seeing seeds growing into vegetables that nurture them and their families.

Additionally, he points out that there is the obvious factor of surroundings. He believes that for people who live in a city with five million inhabitants, it is much harder to be aware of natural environments. Farmers, on the other hand, are immersed in and exposed to nature all the time. He says:

> The location influences people’s perception of nature, their behavior towards it and the choices they make. Another important factor is that we live more and more in a virtual world. We lose the experiential feeling, and therefore the ability to relate to our direct surroundings. When we think
about what functions farms and gardens have, an essential aspect is the potential to bring people directly in connection with nature, through sensual perception.

Once again, this brings me back to Naess’ argument that people need to withdraw into nature to truly gain deep experiences. With respect to this, Goran underlines the importance of physical contact to nature, through the subtle senses, to conceive an embodied connection to our natural surroundings. Goran underlines once more that the experience of the beauty of nature is essential for him. However, he does acknowledge that nature has other important qualities. He illustrates this with the example of silence. Nature gives him a quiet space where he can be alone from time to time. These moments allow him to find his inner voice and remember what he really wants to do in and contribute to life. Withdrawal from outer stimuli is necessary to create these silent moments to hear your inner voice.

Goran underlines that food is an essential part of culture and identity:

Every culture has their own traditions of preparing and consuming food, traditional dishes and food rituals. In terms of food, I would say that food brings people together, it connects them, but it also connects people to nature. However, the longer the food miles, and the more complex the production system, the more disconnected people become from their food. Especially in Western societies, very few people think about where their food comes from, or in which way it is produced, when they buy it in the supermarket. People usually pick the cheapest food and do not check the labels for locality.

Nevertheless, Goran says that with the increasing food trends and environmental movements, he notices an increase of interest for organic food especially. The biodynamic label on the other hand, is still quite unfamiliar. He remains hopeful that with the work he does, he will inspire more respect for food and nature. He states:

If people become more aware and more informed about the consequences of unsustainability of the major parts of the food system, they may treat their food more consciously. There is more than enough food in the world, but we throw away so much.

Goran clearly has a lot of knowledge, not only about farming, but also about diverse environmental philosophies. More importantly, I come to see how he puts his heart and soul into the farm. And there is more to discover, as I am yet to dig a little deeper.
I wake up to see a fog clinging to the ground, and I find myself silently wishing for a little sunlight to break through. I dress warmly and wrap a scarf around my shoulders. Hundreds of snowflakes playfully dance down the sky, some of which swerve into my face and melt by the heat of my skin. I walk towards the meadow where the cattle are grazing. Just before I reach the fence, I come across a lane of small apple trees and I decide to pick some for my breakfast. To my surprise, I find many apples on the ground; most of them rotten. Clearly, they have not been picked on time. I enjoy wandering around the farm, harvesting vegetables and gathering eggs for dinner or picking fruits for breakfast like I do now. My body is aching from both the cold and the physical work, but the fresh air blows a sense of freedom in my mind.

As usual, we start the day with a short meeting at 07.30h. It is still dark outside – and quite cold – so I comfort myself with a cup of organic herbal tea and sit down at the table in the shared kitchen. I notice a clear difference between the people at Earth Haven Farm and the people at Nordgard Aukrust. Whereas my fieldwork in Canada went smooth and the people were very open and excited to share their stories and experiences, at this farm in Norway it is significantly more difficult to talk to people. Generally, Norwegians are known to be reserved in their interaction.

Today, a young woman arrived on the farm. Elena is only present during my second week on the farm, because she takes a part-time course in horticulture, and works part-time at Nordgard Aukrust. Thick, black hair droops around her slightly pale cheeks, and her disarming smile and big, kind eyes would make anyone feel at ease. Different from some of my other informants, Elena shows eagerness to talk to me and share her stories. She notices my sense of relief and comforts me by telling that, despite the fact that she is Norwegian, she also finds it difficult to connect to most people in Norway, due to their slightly reserved nature. According to her, this is even more the case in this region. She states that the people here usually need a lot of time to open up and build trust relationships.

The café is not heated, so we decide to stay in the kitchen in the main house where the warmth of the fireplace comforts us. As I have not had the time to get to know Elena, I start with introducing myself and my research. Thereafter, I tell Elena something about the

25 I am aware of this limitation, which at times creates tension between the nature of my interviewees and the scope and time constraints of my fieldwork.
26 Appendix II.II: Image 4.
conversation I have had with Goran about the notion of stewardship in farming. She affirms that most small-scale farmers feel responsible to take care of the land. Additionally, she says: ‘When people think about Norway, they often imagine a landscape such as this area. The romantic idea of the small-scale farms in mountain-scapes are an important part of the cultural identity.’ Elena’s comment is in agreement with the aforementioned study of Daugstad et al. (2006), and the argument that sustainable farming methods do not only contribute to management and conservation of the land, but also maintain cultural landscapes. However, Elena remarks that many of the Norwegian agricultural traditions are fading away, as she tells me:

A lot of the small-scale farmers are selling their land or lending it out, because they cannot manage their farms economically anymore. I come from the inland, where there used to be many small-scale and mountain farms. For me, the typical farmer lives with his family on a small plot of land and grows food for their own needs, and perhaps a little more for the community. Farming also used to be combined with hunting and fishing. The typical image of Norwegian farmers is a heritage from the period that Norway was still a poor country. Life was not easy, and very few would want to live like that now. Now, small-scale farming is becoming more an idealist vision of people with a free spirit who want to grow food for themselves; as a hobby, not as a business. The farmer’s life is far from idealistic; it is hard work, it is lonely, and it requires a lot of determination, strength and passion for the job.

Elena continues by explaining that growing up in an agricultural area has always made her feel close to nature and, to a large extent, made her realize that she needs a natural environment around her to feel comfortable. I ask Elena how she sees her relationship to nature. She speaks of her strong connection to nature and to the land, when she says:

I think it is crucial that people reconnect to nature again. I think that being disconnected is one of the main reasons why many people are not happy with their lives. Whenever I feel out of balance, I seek the quiet space of the mountains. Being out in nature has a healing effect on people, or on me at least. On the contrary, continuously being in human-made environments can be very stressful. Many people believe that we always must be efficient, efficient, efficient… But truly, we do not always have to be efficient. We need to learn to slow down.

Elena seems to find benefit to herself in being on the farm. She describes it as the perfect place to slow down and simply work with and be in nature. She understands biodynamic
farming as an agricultural method that values the bigger picture and understands the interconnectedness of the farm, that every little aspect affects the larger whole. Elena critically states that today’s Western societies are very much focused on efficiency and capture a sense of rush and stress. She believes that part of the problem lies in the pressure to keep up with the fast-paced life, which she describes as follows:

Farming teaches me to stop and take a break to take it all in. To simply listen and stay quiet. When we are quiet, we learn to truly listen. For example, to listen to what the land tells us. There are a lot of critical comments to be made on biodynamic farming. Yet, the one thing it really contributes is to teach us to slow down and listen to the land. I like this very much about Goran’s approach to the aesthetics of the farm, because it brings out joy and enjoyment.

I ask Elena about her connection to nature and how the work on the farm has affected this. She takes a moment to think about the question, and then replies:

Personally, the farm has taught me to value nature more, as I have become increasingly aware that we are all a part of this. I think that many people start to realize more and more that we are dependent on everything around us. It is essential to acknowledge that, if we ruin a part of nature, for example by taking away all the life from the soil, it directly affects us as well. It is actually very logical. Some people think it is an ethical principle, but it is just being smart, because it essentially is a way of caring for your existence. When people speak of sustainable development, they often use it in terms of the future generations. However, I think it is important to think of it right here and right now as well. I would not necessarily say that biodynamic agriculture is a necessity for this. Whether it is biodynamic, organic, horticulture or any other sustainably labelled approach, it is about the main message.

I ask her if she can elaborate on biodynamic and organic farming in Norway, upon which she replies that most small-scale farmers care a lot about the land. She characterizes conventional farming in Norway as relatively environmentally friendly, due to the strict rules on the use of anti-biotics, chemicals or even moving farm animals between regions. She believes that Norwegian conventional farming is somewhere in between conventional and organic agriculture. Yet, she notes that with the spiritual connection to the land, biodynamic agriculture definitely adds an extra layer. She concludes that the people who choose a biodynamic approach are more aware of their connection to nature and the therapeutic qualities it holds.
When I ask her about her view on the spiritual aspect of biodynamic agriculture, she hesitates for a moment. Then she says:

I am not sure if I believe that the intention or thoughts of the farmer matter for the produce they grow, or that plants are susceptible to energy in general. It seems a little farfetched. But I do not like to be close-minded, so it may be that we are over-humanizing everything with our rational thinking.

Elena is not the only one who has doubts about the spiritual nature of biodynamic agriculture. Later that day, I find Jorn sitting leaned forward at the kitchen table. Jorn is an intern at Nordgard Aukrust. He is 27 years old and was born and raised in Belgium. Despite the fact that we share the same mother tongue, Dutch, we both seem to be more comfortable with speaking in English. I wonder why he is sitting in a seemingly uncomfortable position but, when I look more closely, I see that he is carving wood. I sit down, and he shows me the statue-in-progress. He gives me a crooked smile and tells me that is supposed to be an owl. We exchange some small-talk, and I ask Jorn if he would like to sit down with me for an interview. He agrees, on the condition that I bake a chocolate cake for him. I cannot help but laugh and tell him that we have a deal.

Jorn tells me that when he was young, he always felt different from other children. Since the age of 11 he has been going out in nature as much as possible and shied away a little from big crowds. He started an education in green and forest management. However, he found it hard to get a job in this work field. Subsequently, he started working as a volunteer on organic farms and he felt much more comfortable here. After he gained experience in organic farming, he started his own CSA. Unfortunately, he could not get enough members to sustain the CSA. Jorn came to Norway because it has a more promising outlook on availability of fresh water, wood and other natural resources, and the fertility of the soil. He tells me that, with an eye on the changes in climate, he did not want to stay in Belgium. Therefore, he intends to settle down in Norway. He came to work at Nordgard Aukrust for an extended period of time, to learn about the land, soil and climate. Jorn is a little introvert, but I soon notice he has a lot of experience with and knowledge of farming.

Jorn opens the conversation on biodynamic agriculture by stating that it is simply another way of farming. I cannot help but notice some skepticism in his voice when he says that it is a more radical version of organic agriculture with more rules applied. I ask him if, and why, he is skeptical towards the biodynamic approach, and he answers:
I am not sure if people who buy biodynamic products understand what they buy. Or actually, I believe that most people do not have a clue. There are so many labels in today’s world: organic, biodynamic, Fairtrade, vegan… In Belgium, we have an expression that says: ‘You cannot see the trees through the forest anymore.’ I feel like this is the case. It is hard to find out where products come from and how they are produced. To be fair, I do not think many people are very much concerned with it either, sadly enough. Besides, there is a lot of 'false' or 'green' labelling, so the labels are not even reliable at all times.

He continues telling me that this is the reason why he has always done organic farming, and this is also what he wants to do in Norway. He explains that organic farming is well-known and easier accessible for people than biodynamic farming. Furthermore, it is already a good step forward, he says, because it eliminates the use of fertilizers and chemicals. Thereafter, he points out to me that Norway stands out in the sustainability of its agriculture compared to many other countries in Europe and worldwide:

Even non-organic farmers in Norway use relatively little fertilizers or chemicals. What is most commonly used are compact and liquid fertilizer, and these are not as bad for the land. In general, Norway has a very good soil quality and the government has set strict rules for farming methods to maintain this.

Nevertheless, Jorn acknowledges the importance of soil conservation. The way biodynamic agriculture focuses on increasing the quality of the soil, is what can relate to. He, too, considers soil fertility and crop diversity to be essential in farming.

It gives a refreshing and new perspective to talk to a farmer who works on a biodynamic farm but critically reviews the method. Although Jorn does not talk much about spirituality or deep experiences of nature, I understand that – in his own way – he experiences a connection with nature, which is one of the things that attracted him to farming. Above all, nature calms him down, he says. It takes away feelings of anger and frustration that he encounters in daily life, and which especially arise when he wonders upon the damage people cause to nature. He points out that already at a young age, he did not understand why people treat nature the way they do. Jorn frowns, and I can see a glimpse of the frustration as he tells me that humans are greedy and ignorant in their belief that they stand above nature and can use it to fulfil their infinite longing for more, blind to the consequences. Whereas a lot of responses to this firm statement cross my mind, I keep quiet
and, by being silent, give him the possibility to continue. His face softens when he speaks of his respect for small-scale, organic vegetable farmers: ‘It is a hard life, financially, physically and socially.’ However, he proudly notes that it is exactly these farmers who perform work that actually sustains life in harmony with nature. ‘Sustainable vegetable farming is nature friendly, and in the case of Norway it can actually aid in conserving the land.’ On the other hand, he remarks:

Many farmers keep different kinds of animals as well, and this is a lot less sustainable. In the first place, animals have a different kind of awareness – or have awareness in general – other than plants. They are sentient beings that need a lot of space. In my opinion, it is not natural or logical to keep animals. Farms are not a zoo. For example, chickens are like normal birds. They do not lay an egg every day, but we have made it like that. It is the same when it comes to cows: naturally, they do not give milk every day, and obviously their calves are not taken away. Agriculture is a human-made system. When I think about how industrialized, automatized and especially anthropocentric the conventional agricultural systems have become, I wonder what drove us to screw up nature like this. It is not for the cause of our survival or basic needs. We want more: more money, more food, more luxuries, that are as easily and efficiently produced as possible.

I ask Jorn what he thinks is needed to shift the mindset of people. He answers immediately: ‘Information’. On the one hand, it is an obvious answer. On the other hand, I wonder if this is actually the case, as we live in a time where there has never been so much information accessible. The age of information or digitalization has shaped a knowledge-based society around high-tech devices, methods of communication, advanced technology and other service operators. Never before has there been such a vast amount of knowledge available to so many people. Yet, perhaps it is difficult to ’see the trees through the forest’. He continues by saying: ‘The overload of information can make it difficult to distinguish what is valid or not, and what we should anticipate on. Perhaps the overload of information makes it easier not to act or react at all, or act and react out of convenience.’ This last statement reminds me of the well-known study of Kari Norgaard on Norwegian climate denial. Herein, she states that the lack of social action cannot longer be excused by an information deficit. Rather, she argues that it is the failure of integrating the available knowledge into everyday life (Norgaard 2011). Norgaard’s argument brings me back to the importance of uniting the intellectual and the experiential realms.
This chapter has showcased that Nordgard Aukrust is a place that allows new living landscapes to re-emerge alongside human life and allow humanity to learn experientially about our living environment. Listening to the land has been pointed out as an important aspect within this learning process. Moreover, it has become clear that the people at Nordgard Aukrust do not talk specifically about spiritual and deep experience of nature in the same way as the people at Earth Haven Farm do. Nevertheless, along the same lines, they do highlight the importance of being out in nature and connecting to the land. Goran underlines that we should move away from the image of a farm as a place where food is simply grown. He argues that for the future it becomes more and more important that we come to think of (biodynamic) farms as places where people can experience their living environment. Hence, he does not want Nordgard Aukrust to be a farm where people only come to purchase products. He wants to show people that the farm is a place where people can see a different way of taking care of, and working with, nature. The following chapter will showcase the different ways in which the people at Nordgard Aukrust reach out to the wider community, by inviting them to engage in on-farm activities.
6.2 Creating Conditions for Growth

Manzo and Perkins (2006) discuss the relation between community efforts and place attachment. They argue that people are inextricably embedded in a physical context. People’s attitude and perceptions towards place are essential in how they treat their environment. As explicated in the theoretical framework of this thesis, this ethical positioning is the core of spiritual ecology. Manzo and Perkins further emphasize how connection to place relates to social cohesion and active participation of the community. They conclude that a strong sense of connection results in a stronger sense of responsibility for the place, and a higher participation in caring for it (Manzo and Perkins 2006). It has become clear that it is important to acknowledge the role of participation, and empowerment of the community and their connection to the land. With regards to this, the next chapter discusses the efforts of the people from Nordgard Aukrust to connect the customers and visitors of the farm to the natural environment and encourage them to actively participate in it. In doing so, they create space, not only for sensual experience of nature and place, but also for enhancing social cohesion.

Goran asks me to make flower compositions to decorate the café for the open farm day. I go out in the garden and look around. I decide that I want to make something that represents the state of nature at this time of the year. I gather branches with dark purple and red leaves and combine them with flowers in a warm, orange color. For the finishing touch, I add branches from birch trees, giving the same golden tints that are painted on the mountain sides. While I am playing around in the garden and gathering whatever nature has to offer, I am tempted to climb up in the trees. The colorful branches higher up in the trees almost seem to tease me. I feel as if nature challenges me to be creative. It is a sense of creativity I lost for a while. I decide to keep my feet on the ground and a subtle, sweet scent draws my attention to the flower garden. I realize we cannot only pluck and compose the flowers, but also use them for decorating food to bring it to life; for example, on a cake or in a salad. As I am kneeling down between the flowers, I remember Goran’s words about the importance of beauty in life, and I smile. It is only now I realize how true this is. Despite the fact that the season is ending, the flower garden is still blooming, and so is my

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27 The creativity that comes to life in the interaction between me, the flowers and the autumn mountains is enchanting. In the light of creating conditions for growth, it is remarkable how a part of this inspiration flows from Goran’s gentle encouragement to go out in the flower garden. This example beautifully illustrates what he does: he lets people gain their own experiences, yet supported by his subtle agency with which he creates an environment where one can be inspired; flourishing through his attention for the aesthetics of the farm.
heart. I cautiously put my findings together and hope they will make someone smile.\textsuperscript{28} Flowers are but one example of how nature and nature’s gifts can connect people.

Whereas Earth Haven Farm is a rather closed, private space, as discussed in the first case study, Goran wants Nordgard Aukrust to be a place that people can visit to experience the farm and the food. His own philosophical thinking and questioning about life has made him committed to inspire other people, not in an intellectual or informative way, but by inviting them for on-farm experiences. I notice a contrast between the perspectives of the people on the farm: earlier, Jorn had underlined that information is key. Conversely, Goran believes that the experiential realm holds a therapeutic potential. He explains this accordingly:

There are many people who need therapy. With therapy I do not mean psychological or medicinal help, but I mean being in a therapeutic environment, where they can destress and let go of the pressures of society. The farm is such a healing environment.

Goran further comments that this healing can take place in many different ways, for many different people. I remember that Elena explained how going into the mountains is her way of healing and re-establishing her balance. Moreover, Goran wants to give people inspiration for a different way of acting towards and working with nature; a way that is not out of commercial or economic benefits. Goran accentuates that people have an inherent longing to keep on developing and growing, as he tells me:

We are on Earth to grow as human beings. It is not easy to define what this growth entails, but I think we can use that term. Then, it is important to realize that each human being must grow for themselves. You cannot make another person grow and you should not try to. Forceful or pushing attitudes usually lead to resisting attitudes. Instead, I like to think of the example of tomato plants. We grow tomatoes here in the greenhouse. We try to create good conditions for growth, but we do not grow the tomatoes: they grow themselves. Biodynamic agriculture works in this way, through establishing harmonious and nutritious conditions, such as maintaining a high soil quality. I try to apply this principle when it comes to people as well. Instead of pushing people by telling them how to do things, I try to create conditions for awareness and growth of ecological awareness. What they do with it is up to them.

\textsuperscript{28} Appendix II II: Image 5.
Of interest here is that Goran remarks that having respect for nature is essential, but having respect for people’s free will is equally important. He underlines this by saying: ‘You cannot force anyone to commit to a sustainable lifestyle.’

What Goran describes is very much a Næssian approach, that is: to give people a chance to gain deep experiences, and trust that when they have these experiences, they will start questioning modern and conventional paradigms by themselves. In his own words, Goran states:

I do not believe that waving an anthroposophical or biodynamic flag will convince many people. Instead, I am certain that experiencing nature is more likely to inspire identification and counteract alienation. We try to be an open farm in many ways. Despite the fact that we are far away from big cities, such as Bergen and Oslo, we have quite many visitors. Our goal is to develop this more. Therefore, we built the café, and are now expanding our gardens.

To integrate this vision, Goran has multiple ways of getting the community engaged. He tells me that he does his best to regularly organize on-farm events, to attract people to the farm. One of them takes place this evening, and he insists that I – and the other workers – join the event. And I gladly do.

The event consists of Norwegian storytelling and music. An elderly man takes place in front of the audience. He starts an old Norwegian folklore and plays songs in between parts of the story. I look around me. The audience exists of mostly senior people, coming from this area. Their laughter and enthusiastic singing-along tells me that they are familiar with the folklore.

Later in the week, Goran and his wife organize their own on-farm farmers’ market, or as they call it, ‘open farm day’. Luckily, I am able to experience one of the open farm days. In the morning we finish the last preparations and harvest some more vegetables. Goran and his wife have organized two small workshops at the café: one is about grass-fed beef, and one is about cooking with unfamiliar vegetables. The workshops have an informative nature, but also aim to raise awareness and encourage people to try new products. After the workshops, two of Goran’s children play music. There are about 25 to 30 people on the open farm day. Most of the people know each other, because they live in or around the municipality of Lom. Similar to the music evening, I clearly experience a sense of
community between the people. I am impressed with how Goran and his family have organized the day. Instead of solely focusing on selling produce, the additional workshops and live music make the day both joyful and educational.

The event is over, and most people have left the farm. I ask Goran why it is so important for him to invite people onto the farm. He explicates that farming can be very lonely. Many farmers he knows come to feel more and more isolated from society, especially in more remote areas like Lom. This reminds of one of the people I spoke with earlier that day. It was a senior man, who used to be a farmer himself. He had told me the following:

There is a disconnect between the people working on the farms and the non-farming people in their environment. The life on the farm has limited their social connections. For example, I feel different when I am back in the city and surrounded by big crowds, I have become disconnected from people. This disconnect does not only come from agriculture, but also from the time I have spent in solitude.

In line with this, Goran states that there is a lot of loneliness in farming:

I think it is important not to neglect the social dimension of agriculture. When I grew up on the farm, in older times, there were many people on a farm. You could say that each farm was a small community. It is not like that anymore. One of the main problems of agriculture and farming is that it is getting more and more lonely. There is often only one person running a small farm. The work is hard and time-consuming, so many days can pass by where the farmer does not see anyone. Understandably, it is not a satisfying situation for most people. For this reason, I try to create space for social interaction. This is not a one-way street; the people who come to the farm inspire us as well.

He illustrates this with the example of inviting WWOOF-ers and students to the farm. There are two German girls staying at the farm. They follow an education at a Waldorf school in Germany and came to the farm to gain work experience and learn about biodynamic farming. Goran enjoys having students on the farm, because he believes that school systems have become too intellectual. It has become clear by now, that Goran values experiential learning, and thus he wants to offer students the opportunity for this. Another motivation for Goran is to create a more social place on the farm for his children. He does not want them to grow up in an isolated environment. He underlines that economically this is not beneficial for them, but he has the financial space to do so.
6.2.1 Creating common ground

It stands out to me that Goran runs a lot of different projects: growing and selling vegetables, the cattle, the café, farm events, the shop, the production of dried goods and the flower garden with the stone wall that is still in the process of construction. During my conversations with the people who work on the farm, some critical notes are made on the lack of structure on the farm. This comes as no surprise to me, as Goran has to divide his attention between the different projects. Jorn argues that Goran does too many things, leaving parts of them unfinished. He tells me that part of the land is not in use. Whereas there is a lot of potential on the compound to increase the production, Goran does not focus enough on the vegetable garden, in his opinion. He concludes that this negatively affects the food production. Interestingly, Jorn, who expresses to be less philosophical, is more focused on the practical aspects of farming and on maintaining a high production. Oppositely, Goran has a more broad and holistic vision which addresses the multidimensionality of farming.

Jorn touches upon another interesting point of discussion, when he tells me that, in the light of combatting environmental challenges, re-localization of food systems is an essential part. He refers to the motivation of the CSA he set up in the past:

Local food systems, and alternative food networks, such as CSAs, are important for reducing food miles, creating community and increasing awareness of where food comes from.

I tell him a little bit about the CSA model of Earth Haven Farm and ask him what he knows about CSAs in Norway. To my surprise, he points out that Norway is a leader in expanding the CSA concept. From about 14 in 2014, the CSAs have grown to a rough number of 80 today. When I ask him if he can elaborate on the popularity of CSA, he says:

The CSA model is a great system for both the farmers and the members. The shared risk-reward system allows small-scale farmers to make the necessary investments at the beginning of the season, without a high risk of financial problems in the case of a bad harvest. The members receive a wide variety of produce of high quality. The wide variety of vegetables may not be appreciated by all members, because not everyone is open to trying new things. However, usually the members can express preferences of what goes into their food boxes.
I see a lot of parallels between Jorn’s explanations and what I have seen at Earth Haven Farm, where the CSA system is important for managing the financial situation of the farm. The farmers in the first case study are motivated to provide fresh and healthy produce to the community. In turn, the members get high-quality vegetables. Jorn further notes that some CSAs allow members to make monthly payments, to make it more accessible for low-income families. However, most CSAs require the full payment in advance. In these cases, the target group consists mainly of young families with high education or retired people who cannot grow their own food anymore. Jorn addresses another interesting point:

One of the key problems nowadays is that people do not have time anymore. Many people feel like they constantly lack time. The CSA allows people to consume fresh food that is grown with care, without needing to spend time on it themselves. The CSAs that I know of work through pick-up systems. The disadvantage of this is that they lose the direct connection to the farm and the farmer, which limits the connective potential of CSA.

I recognize this last comment from the CSA at Earth Haven Farm, where the people also acknowledged to have little personal contact with the members due to the pick-up system. Despite this, Jorn believes that the CSA has a big potential to increase environmental awareness through inspiring people to think more about where their food comes from and how it is grown. He argues that the CSA is good for localizing food networks, but it may not be as communal as it suggests being. He exemplifies this by noting that he does not know of many farms who require work hours, because not all members are willing to commit to this requirement. Opposing this, scholars such as De Lind (1999), Bjune and Torjusen (2005) and Sharp et al. (2002) have done research on CSA case studies in which the farmers do focus on community development, for instance through organizing on-farm events for their members, or asking members to pick up their food boxes at the farm.

Even though Goran does not run a CSA, it is clear he developed enough other ways of enhancing community development on and around the farm. Apart from the local community, Goran points out that the farmers in the area of Gudbrandsdalen cooperate in providing food for local restaurants and hotels. The networking and collaboration between small-scale farmers contribute to the development of local food networks and enhance connectivity and inclusiveness in the rural region. Besides this, tourism has also been cited as an economic alternative in the rural area. Increase of rural tourism is beneficial in areas where primary and traditional occupations are in decline. Tolstad (2014) has done research
on collaboration between small-scale firms in the light of increased rural tourism in the area of the Gudbrandsdalen valley. She concludes that, although the economic benefits of rural-tourism are valued, the closer connections amongst the businesses are more important. She puts emphasis on the benefits of fellowship and friendship between the firms. Although Tolstad does not mention farms specifically, Goran expresses similar ideas about the benefits of strengthening collaboration within the agricultural sector in Gudbrandsdalen. He further points out that he tries to involve local people in the farming activities. The following illustration exemplifies this.

We are out in the field to harvest potatoes. This is quite a big task, and everyone joins in. Apart from the people who work at Nordgard Aukrust, an elderly woman joins us for the harvest. Her name is Jorunn and she lives in Lom. Goran tells me that she volunteers occasionally to help on the farm. Goran has ploughed the field with the tractor, and we are now all crawling on hands and knees to gather the potatoes. It may not be the most pleasant work, but the communal activity makes it a lot more fun. The dark humus releases an earthly scent. We sort the potatoes in two boxes: one box for the 'good-looking' ones, and one for the 'bad-looking' ones. Ever since I gained interest in sustainable development, and consumption more specifically, I have wondered why people do not like to buy 'odd-looking' vegetables. I have always been intrigued by the carrots, pepper and cucumbers that have funny curves, twists or non-regular sizes. The fluttering of a bird’s wings interrupts my pondering, and my attention is drawn back to the work.

Jorunn is crawling on my left side and we have some small talk. She gets excited when I tell her about my background in cultural anthropology and development sociology, as she is an anthropologist herself. I smile when she compliments me about my research approach, which involves digging my hands in the black soil as we do now. She tells me that she believes that it is very important that people reconnect to nature again. She indicates that people have forgotten to appreciate the simple things in life, such as food. The amount of work that goes into growing food is often overlooked, in her opinion. I nod my head and let her speak further. She states that she is very healthy and fit for her age, which she partly considers to be a result of an active life out in nature. She loves gardening, but is not able to have her own garden anymore. For this reason, she enjoys volunteering at the farm. Despite her relatively good physical state, her back is not as strong as it used to be. Hence, I carry her buckets of potatoes to the boxes where we gather them all together. By this time,
the little drops of sweat pearl on our foreheads and our muscles are tense, but the work results in a clear field and a satisfying harvest.

I can feel that the winter is nearing, and the weather is changing. There is a strong wind and it is snowing, so we are working inside. Some people may dislike this time of the year, yet I find the silent grace of the winter somewhat peaceful. On days like this, we package dried herbs, spices and flowers. The farm has a little shop where they sell the dried goods. A part of the herbs and spices are imported, and a part of it comes from the farm. Goran freeze-dries the flowers, beets, etc. and makes his own tea and herbal mixtures. I have found that they are quite popular, and Goran gets orders from all over the country. Earlier, Jorn had made a critical note regarding the unsustainable nature of the dried products. He believes that Goran’s production of the dried goods is conflicting with the goal of supporting local food networks. I decide to ask Goran’s motivation behind this. He explains to me that many small-scale farmers struggle to keep their head above water. The dried products are a strategic way to stand out and reach more people. He tells me:

Nordgard Aukrust is not only a relatively small farm, it is located in a remote area and surrounded by the mountains. On the one hand, the teas, spices and dried flowers are unique products. In this light, they are part of building an identity for the farm. On the other hand, by extending our outreach, I hope to build more name for the farm. When more people know about us, we will be able to inspire more people as well.

I understand Goran’s perspective on this. As he fairly points out, with growing conventional agricultural businesses, it is a challenge to be solely an organic or biodynamic vegetable farmer. As discussed earlier, the people at Earth Haven Farm face these financial challenges. Thus, especially farmers in alternative food networks are in a constant struggle to balance sustainable choices with strategic economic ones. Where Earth Haven Farm focuses on off-grid living and limiting its environmental footprint, they also make compromises, such as driving to the farmers’ markets in Toronto. Along the same lines, Goran extends his food miles by importing organic herbs and selling them on a national level.

I ask Goran about his future vision for the farm, to which he underlines once more: ‘I do not envision a farm as only a place of production. When I think about the functions of farms and gardens, one of the most important qualities is to connect people directly to nature and to their senses.’ He continues:
The past few years we have focused on our building projects, such as the café and the flower garden. What we want now, is to make a wide variety of things happen here. I hope that we can create common ground; that the physical ground on the farm may be a place where different people and different perspectives can meet.

Goran and his family have already started organizing more events and hope to increase this over the course of the next season. Goran believes strongly in the therapeutic qualities of gardens. And thus, his main approach to inspire people and raise awareness is through inviting them to the farm. He is passionate about giving people the opportunity to feel the fresh air in their faces, feel the earth between their fingers, to physically experience nature and the affects this has on people’s mental and emotional state of being. Richard Louv, whom is referenced earlier, names the healing qualities of nature *Vitamin N* (Louv 2016). In accordance to Louv’s arguments, Goran underlines that a simple act of weeding or harvesting fresh produce can alleviate stress or mental fatigue. Moreover, it can give a profound feeling of presence, in nature or in relation with other people. It this light, it also increases community cohesion. In short, the people at Nordgard Aukrust aim to reduce barriers to experiencing and connecting with the natural world and with each other.

This chapter has demonstrated how the people at Nordgard Aukrust create space for people to both grow their connection to nature and to the community. I have found that the balance between communal farming activities, farmers’ markets, workshops and regular social events are a great way to involve people in an open, inviting manner. The social cohesion shines through in and around the farm is clearly visible. Opposed to Earth Haven Farm, at Nordgard Aukrust I have found more attention to the social dimension of agriculture. After my fieldwork at Earth Haven Farm, I thought I had had the full biodynamic experience, but I was wrong. Biodynamic farming may not be as visible in the practicalities of Goran’s agricultural methods, but Nordgard Aukrust is very much a place for nature experience, community and Self-realization. The latter will be set forth in the next chapter.
6.3 The Sprouts of Self-realization

In the previous two chapters, I have discussed the connections that the people of Nordgard Aukrust experience with nature and with the community. Why, then, is it important to reimagine these relationships in the light of developing an ecological consciousness? This chapter will delve deeper into how cultivating these connections can enhance Self-realization and commitment to an environmentally ethical attitude towards the natural environment.

Our surroundings are full of little surprises. While I am walking through the garden, I suddenly spot a large insect hotel29 and I wonder why I have not noticed it before. Insect hotels provide space for essential symbiotic relationships in our gardens. Some may consider insects as loafers and we tend to forget that they have important errands. They seek shelter between the roots of flowers, they browse the curly leaves of kale crops, and pollinate the blossoms of our fruit trees. Bees, in special, underline the reality that we are more - not less - dependent on nature's gifts to us. It is easy to get absorbed by one’s own thinking. Yet, what a wonderful feeling it is to wake up from my thoughts and discover something new. New? The insect hotel that I have overlooked ever since my arrival is definitely not new. New is the realization that it was there all along. More importantly, new is the realization how important it is to acknowledge the relationships it creates space for. New perspectives drive me to question and critically reflect on the initial conclusions I had made after my stay at Earth Haven Farm. I leave the garden feeling fulfilled and excited.

I find Goran in the garage and ask him if he would be willing to have a follow-up interview. During our first interview we talked a lot about nature and community, but we did not get to speak much about his reflections on these experiences. He confirms that he can make time and we agree to meet at the café later that day.

I start off by asking him what biodynamic farming has taught him about what is important for him in life. He frowns and is seemingly caught off guard by my personal question. Then he replies:

I am not sure if it is directly biodynamic farming, but certainly environmental philosophies have encouraged me to reflect more critically on the important things in life. I believe that it is mostly the simple things in

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29 Appendix II: Image 6.
life that make me feel fulfilled and happy. Apart from the obvious answers that include growing your own food and having a family-business, it is also having the opportunity to not only focus on myself, but on inspiring others.

I ask him if he can elaborate on the critical reflections that came to his mind, and he tells me:

We live our daily lives based on automatic habitual behavior, partly imposed by our designed environments. For example, the prevailing consumerism is fed by advertising, magazines, and what not else… Most people in Western societies try to fill up the gaping void with stuff. It drags us further into the delusion that we need all that stuff. However, it does not quite do it for us. Silently, we long for more. Yet, how can it be, that with such a high standard of life in Western societies, there is such a longing for more?

Goran presents me a beautiful example of deep questioning. His own experiences and questions made him committed to create a place, or in his words 'a world' where people can find this for themselves.

I continue by asking Goran about his understanding of spirituality. I notice a slight hesitation from Goran’s side. He carefully underlines that it is a very complex, and often vague topic, which many people try to avoid saying much about. Nevertheless, he opens up about his own ideas. Goran has an interesting perspective on spirituality. As he points out himself, it is largely based on anthroposophy. According to him, anthroposophy aims at integrating the spiritual and the physical world, which he understands as ‘incarnation’. He fairly underlines that the intention is not to be uplifted and fly away into a spiritual world. Rather, it is to combine the two and embody the spiritual into the physical and mundane life. ‘When we learn to integrate knowledge and visions with a physical connection to the earth, we can come to true realizations,’ he beautifully states. Thereafter, he continues: ‘Self-reflexivity and self-consciousness are important. We, human beings, stand out by our ability to reflect on ourselves. For example, the reflection on existential questions about life.’ Interestingly, Goran believes that spirituality is a complementary need to come to understand life and our position in it. More importantly, he stresses that the spiritual can be found in earthly, sensory experiences and practices.

The way Goran describes the embodiment of spirituality aligns with Bron Taylor’s article on *Earth and Nature-Based Spirituality*, wherein he explores the wide variety of environmental spiritualities. Taylor argues that the idea that a sense of connection and
belonging to nature as rather a transforming, instead of a transcending, power is a uniting understanding between the different spiritualities (Taylor 2001). Interestingly, at Earth Haven Farm spirituality and spiritual experiences were more often perceived as transcending the physical world, while at Nordgard Aukrust I find it largely understood in terms of transformational, or, as Goran says, 'Earthly'. More generally, in both the case studies the participants understand spirituality to move beyond solely rational or mental understanding of the natural world. Accordingly, Cooke et al. argue that ‘focusing solely on mental reconnection limits further integration between the social and the ecological, thus countering a foundational commitment in resilience thinking to social–ecological interconnectedness’ (Cooke, West, and Boonstra 2016, 831).

Goran further notes that he believes that self-reflexivity is not an individual process. Instead, he argues that:

> People cannot reflect on themselves without comparison to external actors. Comparison is a fundamental human impulse. I think that this can apply to both human and non-human beings. However, I believe that human interaction is the strongest factor of reflexivity. On the one hand, this can be very beneficial. For example, it allows us to inspire others by setting an example of a way of life, and to get inspired by other people’s ways of doing things. On the other hand, it can also create disillusions about reality, and certain expectations of who we should be and what we should do.

Goran specifically makes a remark on the power of social media, which is increasingly prevailing in today’s societies. He argues that the displayed realities seem almost perfectly constructed and may lead to feel discouraged and deficient. Nevertheless, Goran acknowledges that it is difficult to ‘turn back the time’ and undo the impact of social media on our idea of Self.

Goran wants to focus on the inspirational impact of social connections. For this reason, he tries to reach as many people as possible. It is remarkable that a person who is cautious to open up, has a strong focus and wish to increase social cohesion. He admits that this part is largely intellectual, as the connections are established through vocally sharing knowledge and information. Yet, integrated with the physical, on-farm experiences, they form a holistic approach. He believes that the farm is a place where people can really be themselves and experience what it means to simply be. It allows them to let go of the pressures of
society and go back to human’s substantial needs. Whatever realizations come from this and what they do with it, is up to them.

6.3.1 Convivialism

When I come to speak of spirituality and Self-realization with Elena, she states that spirituality provides a different way of understanding life. This understanding is not rational, but it is based on feeling and experiencing our living environments more consciously. She emphasizes that the understanding of a farm as a holistic and living system is a beautiful way to understand how interconnected life is. In her personal experience, this becomes most apparent in observing the life cycle on the farm, such as seeing the seeds growing into the vegetables that we consume. She finds a lot of fulfilment in playing her part in the cycle, through providing care for the soil, the plants and the animals. I ask her if she has had any specific realizations based on these experiences, and she answers:

I think one of the most important things is to realize that life is very complex, and there is a lot we do not know yet. For instance, I am fascinated by biomimicry, which focusses on learning from the systems that already exist in nature. When I first delved into this, I came to see that enforcing our own designs and systems on nature interfere with the synchronicity of life. However, I think that if we can apply the same mechanism we see in nature to our constructed environments, they will not only be more sustainable but also more successful.

She continues by underlining that biodynamic farming largely follows this principle, for example through the planting calendar, working with the seasons and working towards the farm as a closed system. Elena emphasizes that balance is key, not only in biodynamic farming, but in all farming approaches. Admittedly, she does notice a stronger focus on harmony with nature at biodynamic farms.

If we look at the importance of balance in our environment, we may realize it is equally important to maintain this balance internally. At the inner level, it entails an equilibrium of physical, emotional and mental health. In my opinion, maintaining a healthy balance also involves continuous personal development. Inner and outer balance affect each other. A healthy environment maintains our own health and balance. In the same way, when I feel healthy and balanced, I have a greater ability to take care of my environment.
She continues by saying that it is much harder to put words into practice. I ask her how, in her opinion, a balanced life would look like for nature, the community and the individual. In return, she asks me if I am familiar with the concept of *conviviality*. I confirm a yes, but await her to speak about this further. She continues to speak:

Convivialism cultivates a positive vision of human coexistence. I believe that the biodynamic farm is a good example of this. It is a veritable conjunction of a celebration of life. The farmers co-exist and co-operate with life: *with* the soil, *with* the sunlight, *with* the plants, *with* the animals, *with* the insects, *with* the rainfall, and so on.

She further explains that it is not only the practical functioning of the mutual relationships that is important, it is also awareness of these processes. She tells me that it is important to consciously acknowledge the bacteria that make the soil fertile, as well as the human work that goes into the sowing, maintaining and harvesting. It is these realizations that drive us to move beyond a culture of ignorance and neglect, towards an emotional responsiveness. Elena gives me a beautiful and descriptive impression of her understanding of conviviality. In existing literature, convivialism is broadly defined as 'an art of living together', derived from the Latin word *convivere*. It allows people to take care of each other as well as of nature (Illich and Lang 1973, Raymond 2010). Indeed, it captures both the balance and consciousness we should seek to strive for if the aim is to better our relation to our human and non-human environment.

I ask Elena what she thinks is needed to change people’s understanding of their position within and towards nature. She tells me that she likes to be positive, but that she thinks it will be difficult to inspire enough people to adapt the same ideas, before the tipping point of the climate and other environmental changes. ‘If we have not reached that point yet’, she adds, with a slightly concerned expression on her face. Elena notes that the active participation in the farming activities have inspired her current visions on life, but that this may not be representative for other people:

> It is difficult to change people’s mind without them experiencing what I have experienced myself. At the same time, not everyone is willing to make time or put the effort in getting these experiences. It requires a change of lifestyle, that many would not find very attractive due to their attachments to what their ideas are of comfort and convenience. Yet, solely telling them about how enriching a life in more connection is, is not convincing enough in my personal experience.
On a final note, Elena states that this is something she wants to contribute more to. She intends to use the experiences and insights she gets on the farm in future farming and non-farming activities. ‘I do not think we should focus too much on changing other people. The best thing we can do is to change the way we do things ourselves, and then hope that others will be inspired by your example.’

This chapter has demonstrated that the informants of this case study emphasize the idea that we do not solely understand and interpret the world through our minds. Instead, they believe that we perceive a large part through our sensing bodies. Multiple of the respondents point out that their physical connection to nature does raise awareness on their interconnectedness with nature. Moreover, it is highlighted, once again, that in order for people to develop a more environmental-friendly attitude, they need to gain experiences themselves. Whereas the biodynamic farming practices increase a sense of connection to the land, grounded in human sentience, they are not explicitly mentioned as preconditions. For example, Goran expresses doubt toward the direct influence of biodynamic practices on Self-realization and the experience of nature. He suggests that it may simply be the exposure to a beautiful, natural environment that enhances the process of conscious reflection and questioning. According to Næss, the development of an ecological Self necessitates one to withdraw into nature. Then, it can be questioned whether Næss neglects the importance of social interaction when it comes to self-reflexivity in relation to Self-realization. The participants of this case study have pointed out that Self-realization can also be generated in connection and interaction with other people. Thus, besides immersing oneself in nature, social interaction is another realm which offers space for Self-realization. Self-realization, then, can be extended outwards to cultivate embodied connections with our environment.
7. Discussion

This section will summarize and analyze the most potent findings of this study. The result of this analysis is then brought into critical conversation with existing literature as provided in the theoretical framework. Furthermore, it suggests the importance of ensuring engagement with theoretical underpinnings and their implications, which reflects the research problem of challenges in sustainable approaches to agriculture at hand.

Throughout this thesis, I have guided you through a unique journey which sought to explore the cultivation of embodied connections through bodily experiences in biodynamic farming practices, and the possible inspiration of ethical sensibilities and an understanding of the interrelatedness of all life. The presence of interactional perspectives on the relationship between humans and nature in biodynamic farming suggests great potential for new insights by embracing a wider range of agricultural and ecological theories and perspectives.

Starting out this study, my intention was to dive deep into a single case study: Earth Haven Farm in Canada. The first case study already provided me with a vast amount of data. Yet, finding myself amidst the flourishing gardens of the farm, I felt the urge to dig more deeply into the experiences and meaning-making in biodynamic farming. My data became even thicker in the unanticipated second case study. The two case studies combined offered a rich soil in which we can cultivate personal and academic reflections.

7.1 Biodynamic Agriculture

In the literature review, I have set forth that biodynamic agriculture follows a holistic way of farming, which recognizes the interconnectedness of all life and strives for a relationship of mutual care and responsibility between humans and nature. It takes on an ethical approach to farming, food and nutrition. Grounded in anthroposophy, biodynamic agriculture opened a new way to integrate understanding of nature with a recognition of spirit in nature (Wildfeuer 1995, Steiner 2004, Phillips and Rodriguez 2006). Whilst being in close experience with the soil, one begins to realize what we have inherited: a humus layer which has built up over thousands of years and is now rapidly thinning. It is a great living organism that we are about to exhaust. Regenerating this magnificent, complex,
living soil, is the root motivation of biodynamic agriculture. Indeed, based on the conversations I have had with my respondents, the key aspects of biodynamic agriculture are: maintaining a healthy, regenerative soil without using external resources, learning from the land and working with the rhythms of nature.

Returning to the subject of indigenous ways of knowing nature, several of my informants expressed that biodynamic farming gives them a sense of continuity with their own, more distant culture, even when direct ties to that continuity have been severed. This is most clear in the case of Emrick, who has roots in the Mohawk community. Biodynamic farming is for him a way to set forth this connection and take care of the land. As discussed earlier, the Mohawks used to live in close connection and cooperation with the land and the rhythms of nature. This would also bring us back to the question of the extent to which biodynamic recipes are ought to be followed strictly in order for something to be considered biodynamic. Alternatively, it could be interpreted that the underlying ideas of biodynamic practices can be re-woven even across cultural contingency. Indigenous ways of knowing nature have played, and will continue to play, a role in meeting contemporary challenges in a relevant, contextualized way that is meaningful for local actors. In this case, this is within the context of biodynamic agriculture.

Over the years, the people of Earth Haven Farm have learned how to work with the characteristics of the land and subsequently adapted their farming methods and rhythm of daily life to this. They make use of the biodynamic planting calendar, which helps them decide when to plant and harvest certain vegetables. Their care for the natural world is not only visible in their farming methods, but also in their lifestyle. Earth Haven Farm is largely self-sufficient: with its own well, recycling system and solar panels. The cattle of Scottish highlanders play an important role in the circulation of nutrition on the farm. For example, the leftover produce is eaten by the cows, and the plant fiber is digested by a vast amount of microorganisms in the cows’ stomach. Thereafter, Emrick uses the cow manure to make his own biodynamic soil preparations which are used to nurture the soil and new plant life. In biodynamic agriculture a farm is often spoken of in terms of a closed feedback loop. Whereas Emrick and Maelie do understand the farm as a living organism, it is important to realize that no living organisms are entirely closed feedback loops. They must all be open to larger, looping food and energy cycles.
The case of Nordgard Aukrust has shown that strict practice of biodynamic agriculture is not a prerequisite for developing closer connections to nature and to the community. Although the presence of the biodynamic approach is not as obviously present compared to the case of Earth Haven Farm, the biodynamic approach stands out in the ideologies of the work approach, more than in its practical implementation.\footnote{This does not mean that the regenerative nature of the biodynamic soil treatments is not relevant for the development of more sustainable agricultural systems. However, the technicalities and procedures of biodynamic agriculture have not been a key focus within this study, because they have already been critically addressed in existing research.} Most apparent is Goran’s understanding of the farm as complex, multi-dimensional and reciprocal system. He considers it of great importance that the farmer is capable to adapt every day to the natural surroundings, such as the vegetation and soil compositions, climatic circumstances and available resources. Moreover, he emphasizes the notion that both the way of farming and the way of thinking should reflect the dynamics of the natural world. Another important aspect is the quality of the soil, based on which the farm has received its Demeter certification.

With regards to the key focus of this study, I have found that biodynamic farming – as a lived practice – is an interaction that embraces both the interactivity between people, and between people and nature. I follow Turner’s understanding of embodied connections, which is based on the idea that we understand and experience our world through our sensing bodies (Turner 2011). These embodied connections are an ongoing interaction between the mind, body and the environment. Based on this understanding of embodied connections, and the presented findings, I argue that biodynamic farms provide a relevant context for this question, as biodynamic farming has been noted by the participants as an approach to agriculture that works closely together with nature, evoking the language of bodily, mental and spiritual engagement. Thus, the conversation turns to exploring different ways in which we can reconnect to nature, the human community and develop an ecological consciousness, while recognizing historical, cultural and environmental contingencies. We now consider how the embodied connections in biodynamic agriculture are experienced and could be adapted as a vehicle for transforming the ethics and practices of food production and consumption.
### 7.2 Humans and Nature

Scholars argue that the increasingly mechanical, urbanized and fast-paced societies can be identified as a clear source of our disconnection from nature. Within the terminology of agriculture, I have come to understand it as an erosion of connectedness, or the risk of extinction of (deep) experience. So, what might agriculture look like when people understand their relationship to nature as interconnected, and subsequently act as active cohabitants of the natural world?

The results of this research go beyond previous studies, showing that people can deepen their understanding of the interconnectedness of all life through physical experiences of the natural environment and seeing nature grow and flourish. A major framework for analysis is Naess’ deep ecology, including the threefold cycle of deep senses. Understanding this cycle in the case of biodynamic agriculture, the essence is already apparent in the origin of the word itself: bio-dynamic. The cycle of the deep senses is a dynamic, self-reinforcing loop, which describes an inner journey of Self-realization, yet in interaction with external forces, such as: the elementals, the soil, the farm animals, or the simple blossoming of a flower. This cycle, then, is one of many movements that compose the complex web of life; a dynamic interaction with the *bio* in biodynamic.

Understood through the lens of spiritual ecology, I argue that awareness of, and connection to, the multitude of cycles, rhythms and movements in our living environment is not first and foremost established rationally. Rather, these become embodied through sensory experience of one’s living environment. This is clearly visible in the way the participants of this study emphasize the sensory experience of nature. They indicate that the practices of sowing seeds, seeing them turn into edible plants and harvesting one’s own food are forms of environmental interaction that remind them about their undeniable connection to the earth. These are fine examples of their deep experiences of nature. It is interesting to note that what we observe is not nature in essence itself, rather it is nature the way it is exposed to our own questioning and understanding. Accordingly, I have emphasized the importance of the individual perceptions of the human-nature relationship. These perceptions rely on an integration of feeling, reasoning, sensing and intuition. As discussed in the theories of spiritual and noetic ecology, the intertwinement of these subtle senses is an essential part of meaning-making processes.
The case of Earth Haven Farm has shown that the fairly remote location of the farm offers space for the people to have contemplative time in nature, withdraw themselves from outer stimuli, and commune more deeply with the natural environment. The spiritual aspect of biodynamic agriculture is very much present and signals a certain environmental consciousness of the people who live and work on the farm. The participants of this case study explicitly express deep experiences of nature, in the form of feeling a profound connection to the land, and experiencing a sense of oneness with nature more generally. Multiple informants mentioned that working with the rhythms of nature aids in learning to understand the complex relationships within the life cycle. Moreover, they underlined the importance of realizing how much we rely on the nurturing qualities of the earth, enhancing a sense of respect and gratefulness. Their deep experiences of nature have led them to understand the land as a place with magic and spirit. The meaning of this becomes clearer in the belief that the plants are affected by the intention of the farming, through their esoteric fields. Another interesting finding is that the informants underlined that these experiences are derived in the simple tasks, such as weeding or tending to the animals. This contrasts with Naess’ belief that one needs to withdraw oneself into wilderness in order to experience identification and a sense of oneness with nature (Naess 1987). However, it is more in alignment with Stephan Harding, who stated, as discussed earlier, that people can also have deep experiences in mundane, everyday activities. Yet, close contact with nature – even if it is not fully wild – is an important factor that stimulates these experiences. Harding’s perspective aligns with Christie’s previously mentioned argument that one can commune more deeply with wild, semi-wild or even constructed landscapes through attuning one’s attention and fully being present in one’s living environment.

Comparing this to the case of Nordgard Aukrust, I have found clear differences with regards to the perception of spirit in nature. Different from the people of Earth Haven Farm, the informants of the second case study expressed doubts concerning the spiritual or esoteric aspects of nature. Moreover, deep experiences were not as explicitly spoken of. Nevertheless, the people of Nordgard Aukrust indicated that they feel connected to the land and understand themselves as a part of nature. Travis Cox (2014) speaks the identification of farmers with their land and all living beings in nature. In his dissertation on integral agroecology, he argues that this identification enhances the farmers’ environmental awareness, which is essential in establishing sustainable and holistic agricultural systems. The connection to the land is exemplified by Goran, who mentioned that the through the
physical practice of farming, the ethical position he holds towards nature takes root in the body of lived experience. A final point that stands out to me is the value that is placed on the aesthetics of the farm. In Goran’s view, beauty too is a pathway to living a moral life, and not only the physical practice of farming. Based on these findings, I interpret the experiences that were spoken of do signpost deep experience of connection with nature, although not labelled as such.

7.3 Humans and Community

The participants of this research have indicated to value a sense of community. The most commonly given reasons were: a sense of belonging and connecting to like-minded people, stimulating local food systems, and inspiring others to consume healthy, seasonal and local produce. As showcased in the empirical chapters, there are many different ways to reach out to the wider community, such as: attending farmers’ markets, sharing knowledge and information, organizing on-farm events and applying the CSA model. The latter is a relevant example for the strengthening local food systems.

The informants of Earth Haven Farm value the private and intimate sphere on and around the farm. I found it contradictory when multiple of the respondents expressed their experience of a lack of community. Although the people who work and live at the farm are very close with one another, I noticed little focus on establishing close connections with the wider community with regards to on-farm events. However, they reach out to the community by means of off-farm approaches.

One way is through the CSA system, which intends to bridge the gap and reconnect the farmers and consumers, and to create an ongoing learning relationship that increases consumers’ awareness about the implications of food production and consumption. In return, it provides a support network for small-scale farmers (King 2006). However, the case of Earth Haven Farm has shown that the extent to which the CSA model creates a strong connection to the consumers can be debated. The community of common interest has not yet reached the desired level. The informants indicate to experience a lack of community development. One reason for this could be the functioning of the food box pick-up system, which limits personal contact between the farmers and the CSA members. However, the respondents – both farmers and members – expressed appreciation of the
convenience of the pick-up system. Whereas Emrick feels like they do not do enough to connect to the community, Maelie rather feels like the community is not supporting them. In her opinion, there is a lack of interest in, and recognition of, the labor that goes into the production of food. Conversely, Maelie expressed to find more connection with the people at the farmers’ markets. The farmers’ markets are another entrance point for informing people about the seasonality of the produce, choices in consumer practices and costs and effort of production. Finally, Maelie set up the Earth Haven Learning Center, which offers space for educative workshops on biodynamic agriculture. It is interesting to note that the approach of the participants of this case study remains largely intellectual. This is remarkable, considering the profound presence of the deep experiences they have shared with me. Despite this, the people at Earth Haven Farm consciously try to re-embed sustenance – food and the people who produce and consume it – into a local context. What drives them is knowing that their efforts have the potential to directly affect people’s lives and inspire them to cultivate a more sustainable lifestyle.

I have found two different lived notions of how biodynamic agriculture is understood and performed through practice: the first case, overtly nearer biodynamic agriculture than the second, has a focus on reaching out through more intellectual activities. And the second case, with a lead farmer who speaks the language of biodynamic agriculture less explicitly, but in practice does apply a relatively more holistic way of reaching out to the community. One of the key motivations for Goran especially is to grow a sense of community on and around the farm, which is based on an indicated trend of loneliness in farming. Goran highlights the importance of creating a place where people can experience the farm and the food trough, for example, communal farming activities, farmers’ markets, workshops and regular social events. Similar to the informants of Earth Haven Farm, the participants at Nordgard Aukrust are also committed to educating people about food and farming. However, Goran indicates that he does not believe in the effectiveness of telling people what is wrong or right to do. Instead, he believes that an experiential approach is more likely to affect people’s ethical position towards food production and consumption, and nature more generally.

I do not mean to neglect the value of knowledge sharing, as it may bring attention to the processes related to food. However, it is my interpretation that this experiential approach is an example of how people can inspire each other to more deeply embed certain
conventions into day-to-day practices. I have seen, and experienced for myself, that the latter offers a tangible way that allows one to become part of the process.

Finally, the people at Nordgard Aukrust strongly believe in the therapeutic benefits of immersing oneself in nature. Whereas the informants of Earth Haven Farm also indicated to experience the healing qualities of being out in nature, it is less present in the way they connect to the wider community. Differently, the people at Nordgard Aukrust actively try to engage people by inviting them for on-farm activities.

The benefits of a sense of belonging for people’s social well-being is addressed by a great deal of literature that identifies a biologically-based need to experience a sense of belonging (Mayer and Frantz 2004, Ravenscroft et al. 2012). This entails affiliation with and feeling connected to a larger community, as well as a connection with nature and with life at large. Meyer and Franz (2004) argue that conceiving the need for belonging more broadly as a need for connection to others and to nature highlights the importance for deepening these connections. More specifically, they conclude that the significance of people’s connection to nature does not only benefit the natural environment, but that it is beneficial for humans as well. Meyer and Franz argued that the experience of a closer connection to nature enhances life satisfaction, highlighting that the nature relationship is beneficial for human well-being as well. I have found that these two are not mutually exclusive, rather they are complimentary. It has become clear that use of natural resources increasingly involves interpersonal relationships, and relationships with place. Food, in this light, is a connective concept between people, shared through cultural traditions and our common reliance on it for subsistence. And thus, one of my aims was to gain deeper insight in the social dimension of agriculture. As Ravenscroft (2012) argues, the social and communal traits of agriculture can contribute to understanding these ‘ways in which people actively engage in making multiple connections; with other people, with the land and with their food’ (Ravenscroft et al. 2012, 2).

Taken together, prior research evidence suggests that the social dimension of agriculture – to some extent – enhances active engagement of the community in the food system through community development processes. In my case studies community development processes create space for participation, deep engagement, reciprocity, and creating space for the sharing of knowledge and experiences. At Nordgard Aukrust there was more attention for this than at Earth Haven Farm. Hence, my findings, in part, support the argument made in
existing literature that a community that cultivates a stronger connection with nature could lead to a higher human interest in protecting the natural environment.

7.4 An Ecological Self

In order to stimulate people to develop an ecological sense of Self, there needs to be a willingness to be transformed by the living environment in which we find ourselves (Mayer and Frantz 2004). With regards to the spiritual nature of biodynamic agriculture, it is important to note that the people who are involved with this approach, generally already have a certain degree of concern for the environment. In a way, this may be affecting the representativity of the results of this study. I suggest that there is a need for future research to overcome the limiting conditions associated with this notion.

The respondents of both case studies explained that it is a prevailing challenge to reach and inspire people who are less concerned with environmental practices. This study does not claim to offer a solution to these challenges. However, multiple participants have stated that mundane experiences of nature in daily life can already enhance a sense of connection. Most apparent was Goran’s statement that ‘we cannot change people, but we can create conditions that stimulate them to change.’ Offering people the opportunity to gain deep experience of nature has the potential to encourage them to reflect on their position in the world and, in the light spiritual ecology, their ethical position towards it. The practical expression of this abstract principle is clearly visible in the way Goran works with regards to community outreach. Vice-versa, the practical expression is charged with a deeper rationale and understanding. Subsequently, I have found that direct experiences with nature through farming practices can have a profound effect on human beings that may encourage one to strengthen the ability to commune more deeply with one’s environment. Deep experience of nature through withdrawal into nature was especially visible in the case of Earth Haven Farm. Here, the focus was largely on individual experiences. I have found this to be corresponding to Næss’ argument that, in order to gain deep experiences, one must immerse oneself into natural environments. Conversely, the case of Nordgard Aukrust demonstrates that developing an ecological Self does not necessitate a lonesome, individual path. Goran underlined that this process requires a self-reflexivity that can also be inspired by human interaction. Ultimately, they both aim at the cultivation of an awareness of the interconnectedness of life. According to Kirschenmann (2005), spirituality entails the ways
in which people understand the relationships and connections between all living beings. In this definition, spirituality assumes the same interconnectedness we find in, for instance, deep ecology. Based on the findings of this study, Kirschenmann’s broad understanding of spirituality can be narrowed down to the experience that all life is interconnected and that these connections transcend a sole physical or biological interaction within the life cycles. This brings us back to spiritual ecology.

The process of developing an ecological Self encompassed by spiritual and deep ecology lies at the intersection of detachment from the distractions of designed environments, and deep engagement with the living environment. A relevant remark in respect of this is that the environments of the two farms are not fully designed; they are to be found in the liminal space between – a space of ongoing participation, negotiation, encounter, touch, between humans and the more-than-human. In other words, they are neither fully constructed nor fully 'wild', as in wholly untouched by humans. Interestingly, deep ecology has traditionally been more interested in (seemingly) untouched nature. This research, then, presents a relevant contribution by demonstrating that not only wild environments offer the potential for different ways of living and working in and with nature, and processes that come along with this: Self-realization, questions of participation, or convivialism. Put differently, the liminal space (co)created by these biodynamic farms offers a chance to transcend the old dichotomy between humans and nature, not only in theory, but also in practice.

Another interesting finding of this study is that in both the case studies, the importance of childhood experiences was highlighted. Many informants mentioned that they grew up in or close to nature. Moreover, most of them told me that farming was part of their family’s heritage. Following this, it can be interpreted that an upbringing in closeness with the natural world inspires one to understand oneself as a part of nature. Accordingly, I have found that multiple studies demonstrate that childhood experiences are essential when it comes to people’s perception of the development of ecological consciousness. Scholars have argued that exposure to nature has significant benefits for the health of both children and adults (Wells and Lekies 2006, Hinds and Sparks 2008, Nisbet, Zelenski, and Murphy 2009, Cheng and Monroe 2012). For example, Cheng and Monroe (2012) argue that when children spend more time in nature throughout their childhood, their identification with, and sense of responsibility for, the natural world will be more present in their adulthood. Richard Louv spotlights the disconnection of children from nature in his theory of the
nature-deficit disorder, which underlines the importance of reconnecting to nature (Charles and Louv 2009, Louv 2013).

Together, the present findings and existing literature confirm the fostering of environmental-friendly behavior through expanding our sense of Self, to include identification with the natural world (Fischler 1980, Kirschenmann 2005, Krempl 2014, Cooke, West, and Boonstra 2016). An ecological consciousness comprises this expanded identification with all living beings and stimulates humans to engage with and relate to the natural world. In other words, it can be understood as a way of being that respects the living, natural environment. Additionally, Beery and Wolf-Watz argue that ‘our experiences with the environment as our biotic community will prompt an emotional attachment to, and sense of value for, that community’ (2014, 199). Following this, they argue that people tend to act to preserve the things they are emotionally attached to. In short, humans act on behalf of their environment if the interplay of their sensory, ethical, rational and intuitive senses portrays it as a community to which they belong. This draws back on Berry’s discussion of the living land as both community and communion. Embodied spirituality can then be understood as care for, and indeed love for, the land. This includes a love for ourselves, who too are part of the land, the community and the communion.

A general perspective of this argument is that when people understand themselves as part of nature, they will be less likely to cause it any harm, for doing so would in essence affect themselves as well. Subsequently, it can be argued that the embodied connections that are cultivated in biodynamic agriculture can indeed stimulate expanding one’s sense of Self and lead thus to a more dynamic understanding of, and participative and responsible behavior towards, the social and natural environment. In other words, in biodynamic farming there is a constant and active cohabitation of humans and non-human beings. Ultimately, the aim is to create a deep commitment based on the development of ecological consciousness and an ecological Self, in terms of the willingness to adapt, and the adaptation of choices and behavior to the benefit of all living beings: convivialism. Nonetheless, this cannot be simply assumed, as it is not given that people would not engage in self-destructive behavior. In addition, I believe that further development of questions measuring this facet should consider to explicitly study the prioritization of the well-being of human and non-human life, and perceptions of comfort and convenience of the standards of living.
7.5 The Relevance of Theory and Methodology

As posited in this thesis, there exists a broad literature on spiritual ecology. The reason for this is that the importance of feeling connected to nature has been an early theme in the writing of both environmental philosophers and ecologists. However, the focus has remained largely on intellectual ways of knowing nature. A sheer focus on the mental and rational realms neglects the essential contributions our sensory experiences and ethical sensibilities can make to develop a more holistic understanding of the web of life, and our place within it. The same tension is also expressed in the way the two cases of this study practice – and communicate – biodynamic farming. The challenge arises as we come back to the bridge between the intellectual and experience-based ways of knowing ourselves through nature, and nature through ourselves. For this reason, this study has highlighted the value of complementing this literary framing with perceptual experiences. It underlines the equal need for operationalization of these processes in relation to people’s experiences. Instead of identifying a need of rational and intellectual solutions exclusively, I have found that biodynamic agriculture develops different concrete, pragmatic and ideological answers across the entire continuum of the divide between different ways of knowing. The empirical findings, as analysed in this chapter, allow me to make a strong case for advocating an integration of intellectual and experiential ways of knowing nature. I ground and anchor this claim in this work’s experience-based, qualitative research methods as a dual tool.

First, to gain first-hand, thick data throughout a largely experience-based research. Through working and living on the farm, I had the chance to participate in the full experience of farming: from planting seedlings to harvesting, packaging and selling produce, and from working with my hands in the earth, to preparing fresh produce and serving it at the dinner table. This farm-based study has not only been a research, but a natural process of two disciplines: science and living. This thesis is the output of different living experiences, interpreted in various scientific, ecological, social and phenomenological contexts. The integration of methodologies is nothing new, but a well-tried principle within the field of biodynamic agriculture. For example, combining experiential learning with on-farm participation and personal reflection is an important part of the Biodynamic Initiative for the Next Generation (BINGN 2019, Mead 2014). In other words, this study has also been a journey of cultivating the craft of research. The challenge for me as researcher was to constantly seek balance between – and integrate – the intellectual and experiential realms.
It is a fine balance between participation and relationship building, whilst maintaining a certain objective distance, therein continuously reflecting on existing literature and my position as a researcher. Science has, most definitely, been a powerful endeavour that provided me with knowledge of great significance. However, it has never been able to explain the emotional connections or intuitive capabilities I experience. I learned this through uncountable barefooted walks, morning yoga sessions and sunset-meditations, through digging deep into the earth, until my eyes lose sight of my hands and I move solely through the sensations in my fingertips, and through constantly mirroring my perspective with that of others, recreating our own truth(s) and understanding(s) – dynamically, in living.

Second, to critically analyze the data in critical review of existing literature, with the aim to more fully understand the experiences and meaning-making processes of the participants of this study. The analytical framework of spiritual ecology, and the philosophies of deep ecology and anthroposophy, have been highly relevant in understanding the data of this study. In the first place, the literature study provided me with necessary background knowledge before starting my fieldwork. This enabled me to develop interview guides in a way that it supports answering the research questions. Throughout the analytical process, the framework has helped me to select relevant information and structure my data in the way it is presented in this thesis. Theories on spiritual ecology gave me insight in the ways in which people relate and connect to nature. Naess’ deep ecology especially has helped me to understand the process of Self-realization, through the threefold circle of the deep senses. The existing literature enriched my understanding of my own findings. In turn, these findings, and my critical discussion of them, also mark a fresh contribution to, and an enrichment of, that literature. With respect to this, this study contributes to contesting and reshaping existing knowledge and understandings, following the awareness that scientific knowledge itself is also dynamic.
8. Conclusion

Let me take you back to the roots of this research: cultivating embodied connections. The word 'cultivating' within the field of agriculture contains the meaning of improving the soil through practices of ploughing and nurturing. I chose the word cultivating for the title of this thesis, because the contribution of my research is to be found in the way in which I plough the field of academia, and nurture it with the input of newly gained insights and perspectives. Like agriculture, and life, science is dynamic: it is in constant movement, and constantly contested and re-shaped. In this process of ploughing and nurturing, there has been a dynamic relationship between me, as gardener, and the soil, as my research field. Only recently have I come to understand that we become cultivated as much as we cultivate; by the way we depend upon a soil, a honeybee or a pearl-shaped raindrop. In these encounters, interactions, dependencies and exchanges, we too are sprouting; we form societies, we learn, we grow, and we are shaped by the life forces that enfold us. My hope is that this study will sprout a seed of inspiration, which can grow beyond – and transcend – the written work within this thesis and move forward into the world.

I started out this thesis by demonstrating that there is growing consensus that individuals in Western societies need to change their attitude and behavioral patterns in profound ways to cultivate an attitude of care and responsibility towards the living environment. A general assumption in this research, then, is that the way we understand and construct the natural environment, and our relation to it, will shape a specific trajectory of future agriculture. Our ways of making meaning within these processes, in this unprecedented moment of Earth’s history, matter deeply. Thus, before we can counteract the challenges that lie at the intersection of agriculture and sustainable development, we must come to understand the underlying perspectives, meanings and practices of food production and consumption. I have explored this through the two case studies of biodynamic agriculture that lie at the heart of this research. As a main analytical framework I used spiritual ecology, which came into being as reaction to the way we understand humanity’s relation to nature as root cause for problems in current food systems. The results of this study contribute to a broader understanding of the implications of spiritual ecology and inspire a greater commitment to – as well as critical reflections of – its ideals.
Biodynamic agriculture is understood as a holistic farming method, which acknowledges the importance of people’s ethical and spiritual values regarding the natural world. Grounded in the intertwinement of varying theories of spiritual ecology, I set out to explore how people understand their relationships with nature, and how this understanding influences personal values and the behavioral implications they entail. While ambitious in scope, and including inevitable simplifications, this study is valuable for showcasing that biodynamic agriculture can aid in creating agricultural landscapes where people enact their relationship to nature in a different, more conscious way.

Earth Haven Farm and Nordgard Aukrust are places where people can learn experientially about the natural environment. Farming practices like sowing, gardening and harvesting are perceived to give sensory experiences of a close connection to nature, and exemplify embodied connections. Through these bodily practices of working with nature we can glimpse new articulations of the human-nature relationship. For example, in the way the participants of this study identify themselves as a part of nature, or through the efforts of the participants to work with the rhythms of nature and nature’s life cycles, and to create regenerative agricultural systems. These articulations indicate our inalienable and non-negotiable connectedness with the more-than-human world. Nevertheless, the diversity of human perceptions, experiences and meanings are not necessarily agreed upon. Instead, they, too, are dynamic and under constant negotiation.

Furthermore, I have highlighted the importance of social cohesion and active participation of the community. Biodynamic farms hold the potential to support local food networks and connect people with each other, through sharing knowledge and experiences around food production and consumption, and nature more generally. Whereas mutual learning and knowledge sharing are indicated to be essential aspects in raising awareness on the challenges of sustainable food production and consumption, I have underlined that an experiential approach may prove to be more relevant. The aim, then, is to create environments in which people can get new experiences that inspire them to rethink their relatedness to their environment. This may be considered a promising aspect of enhancing ecological consciousness. Considered the rural settings of the presented case studies, future research could fruitfully explore this issue further by focusing on ways to engage communities in urbanized areas.
Finally, based on the threefold cycle of deep senses – deep experience, deep questioning and deep commitment – my findings indicate that the practice of biodynamic farming holds the potential to encourage and translate empathic identification with the natural world into an ideological framework. This, then, can develop into a lifestyle involving choices and actions that are based on the benefit of the whole of life. Such commitment in turn can lead to deeper experiences, which again can lead to further, deep questions concerning our place in the vastly diverse and dynamic life of this biosphere. Both ethical and active engagement with nature are necessary preconditions for a trajectory of building a more sustainable world. Those who are most active in biodynamic practices, such as the participants of the two presented case studies, seem to have deeply internalized and operationalized environmental and social values of embedding an attitude of care and responsibility towards all life into day-to-day practices.

Although it is unlikely that people can create the environmental and social change they aim to inspire purely through agricultural practices, the data presented supports the notion that people who are involved with biodynamic farming develop a stronger connection to nature and to the community. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the actual pattern of the data is particularly interesting, as there are no outlying data pointing to the importance of actual biodynamic practices, such as the planting calendar or the soil preparations. My findings suggest that the vision underlying biodynamic agriculture can be integrated without performing it practically. This relates to the felt continuity between biodynamic farming and other, older cultural practices, including indigenous ways of knowing and being. Alternatively, it could mean that the significance of biodynamic practices is subject to individual perceptions, experiences and meaning-making. The unexpected findings signal the need for additional studies to understand more about the underlying ethics of food production and consumption in agricultural systems differing from biodynamic farming.

The data of this research was exceptionally rich. However, the scope of this research has clearly been limited due to the relatively short period of fieldwork. I am aware that a larger timeframe and inclusion of more case studies could enhance representativity. Therefore, I suggest that more systematic and theoretical analysis is required to widen the scope of its influence, and to disentangle encountered complexities. Despite this, the comparative nature of this research, and the integration of subjective ontologies of the participants,
sensory and first-hand experience, and critical literature review, make this study a significant contribution to existing research in the field of environmental ethics, sustainable agriculture, and biodynamic farming especially.

In this thesis I have argued that we need to grow our sense of connection to, and reimage our relationship with, our natural environment and with one another. I have found that biodynamic agriculture, in its myriad forms, has the potential to counteract the industrial thinking that assumes a dichotomy between humans and nature, and allows the reaping of nature and natural resources for economic benefits. In dialogue with spiritual ecology, this study has shown that cultivating embodied connections through farming practices can help to foster an ethic of care for both the human and non-human life with which we share this planet. In framing sustainable responses to current environmental issues, I argue that biodynamic agriculture is one potent way to establish a relationship with the Earth as a living entity, in which we are indissolubly embedded, and to which, in the final analysis, we are all accountable.
Afterword

Upon boarding my plane, as a student and researcher, prepared with a considerable amount of literature research, I was not yet aware that, in the vastness of the world, unanticipated insights would await me that would change my perspective on life. These are insights into the traditional and day-to-day ways of knowing nature, which are embodied in the connectedness of our own humaneness in being part of it all.

It was not long before I started realizing that my initial adolescent perception of agriculture had been slightly superficial and biased. The complexity of agriculture goes way beyond only food production. I learned about diverse ecological, social and spiritual paradigms underlying the food systems. I came to understand that alienation and disidentification from nature are principles that keep the conventional and exploitational systems alive. After my initial curiosity was tempered, I started asking myself more critical questions, which would explain a renewed interest in agriculture. I too am – still – on an open-ended path of deep questioning. And so my research transformed from an academic project into a journey of personal development and reflection upon life at large.

As individuals, as societies, as humanity, we have become strangely disconnected from the Earth’s communion of subjects. Although I believe this disconnection only exists in our minds. I started wondering how my sensing body is entangled in the communion of creatures, and the forces in nature. The sensible and spatial element which is perceived by most humans as the 'exterior', became – in my eyes – more fluid, transcending hard boundaries between human and non-human, or even living and non-living beings. I began to cultivate a greater awareness that my sensing body is dependent on other lives: it is nourished and sustained by the plants whose fruits I ingest during my breakfast, and the cocoa beans that compose the chocolate I nibbled on while I was writing this thesis. Along with this, I started realizing that my life sustains that of others too. Not only did I learn to pay closer attention to the cycles of life, the change of the seasons, the flow of the rivers, or the breathing of the forests, inside of me sprouted a seed of immense gratefulness for simply being alive. Alongside this, I developed a gratitude for the sharing and mutual learning between people, whether through conversing or simply silently being – together. These realizations also led to a growing sense of commitment and responsibility to act, because I, too, leave an imprint. For example, my influence on the way we produce and
consume food through the choices I make. This breathing planet, with its crumpled surface and teeming biodiversity, is our home. *Now* is the time to embrace this mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship.

I do not perceive this project to end with the submission of this thesis. Instead, I have come to understand it as a lifelong process, which I intend to carry forward beyond my studies, into my (future) work and daily life. My hope is that this research can inspire others to rethink their position within our vibrant and enchanting communion, and reignite their joy in and love for life.
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# Appendix

## I. Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Emrick</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Maelie</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Hjalmar</td>
<td>Garden manager and intern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yva</td>
<td>CSA manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Andras</td>
<td>Intern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Marian</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Liam</td>
<td>Anthroposophist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Inga</td>
<td>CSA member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Jeanne</td>
<td>CSA member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Emrick II</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Goran</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Jorn</td>
<td>Farmer and CSA manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Lise</td>
<td>Intern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Elanora</td>
<td>Intern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Goran II</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Elena</td>
<td>Farmer and sustainable agriculture specialist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
II. Gallery

II.I Earth Haven Farm

1. Earth Haven Farm
2. My accommodation
3. Barefoot experience
4. CSA preparations
5. Apple picking
6. The market stand
II.II Nordgard Aukrust

1. The farm café on the mountain side
2. The café terrace
3. The flower garden
4. The main house
5. A flower composition
6. The insect hotel