Understanding sense-making in volunteer units

– A multiple case study of two environmental NGOs

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to provide a deeper understanding of how volunteer units work, in order to find out ways of how to successfully recruit and retain volunteers for a longer period. Guided by practice theory, the study explains the sense-making of coordinators and volunteers. By answering the research question about how the members of volunteer units make sense of recruiting and retaining volunteers, the analysis has resulted in a comprehensive picture of the volunteer units within two environmental NGOs. The study shows that it is difficult for volunteer groups to retain their members if they do not have a strong core group. It can also be challenging to recruit new volunteers for groups that consist of people who know each other well and do not prioritise attracting new people. For future research, it would be interesting to take a closer look at the importance of building core groups to retain volunteers. It could also be valuable to explore what possibilities there are for volunteer units to collaborate.

Keywords: volunteering, volunteer units, environmental NGOs, practice theory, sense-making

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1 Introduction

1.1 Research problem

If environmental campaigns are to make a real impact, they need to mobilise citizens and contribute to behavioural changes on a larger scale, and not only inform the public (SEI, p. 1). Despite the efforts of scientists, policy-makers and activists to raise awareness of environmental issues for more than two decades, research shows that public concern about climate change has stagnated, or even declined, over recent years in many countries. Climate change is labelled as one of the greatest challenges of our time (Capstick et al. 2015, p. 53), and there is a need for action-taking in many different forms. Volunteering is one important way, since social movements are especially valuable for mobilising collective action (SEI, p. 6). Even though many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) develop various intrinsic and extrinsic awards for their volunteers, one of the problems which they often come across is how difficult it is to retain volunteers over a longer period of time (Bussell and Forbes 2002, p. 251).

Research shows that communication in relation to climate change "involves huge and complex issues, raises fundamental questions about our economy and lifestyle, and seeks to engage individuals to tackle a problem that can only be solved through collective action" (SEI 2016, p. 1). To accomplish such mobilisation, it becomes necessary to understand what motivates people to act (Ibid, p. 1). Some researchers argue that NGOs are failing at mobilising people effectively even though they have knowledge about what motivates people to become volunteers. In general, NGOs are concerned about raising public awareness and inspire people to act (McDonald 2016, p. 1059). Somehow, they fail do to so, and the question is why. Personally, I have been active as a volunteer in different organisations for several years. Even though I have cared about the environment for as long as I can remember, I have on several occasions experienced feeling de-motivated after a few months in one organisation and then moved onto the next one, or simply stopped volunteering for a while. From my experience, the most difficult part is not inspiring people to act, but rather motivate volunteers to stay active for a long time. Therefore, I want to know more about the challenges volunteer units within environmental NGOs are facing, and explore if they can be handled in a better way.

There is a wide field of studies which focuses on what motivates people to voluntarily take action when it comes to environmental issues. For instance, it is shown that people volunteer because they have a close connection to nature and therefore care about the environment, that they believe in the power of citizenship (Liarakou et al. 2011, p. 651), or that they want to express their values and socialise with people who have similar interests (Bruyere and Rappe 2007, p. 503). Other studies concern strategies for how NGOs can recruit volunteers by understanding the motives for why people volunteer (Bussell and Forbes 2002, p. 248), or highlight the economic value of volunteers since they work for free (Bowman 2009, p. 491). However, there is not much research carried out with an emphasis on providing a comprehensive picture of volunteer units, covering both the views of volunteer coordinators and the experiences of volunteers themselves. I would argue that a different type of understanding is needed if we are to find out ways for how to successfully recruit and retain volunteers for a longer period. In my view, an analysis of what, how and why the people at volunteer units do what they do, would be a valuable contribution to the field by providing insights that can be of help for coordinators and volunteers in their ongoing work.

1.2   Purpose and research question

The purpose of this study is to provide a deeper understanding of how volunteer units work. Therefore, I have conducted interviews with coordinators and volunteers from two environmental NGOs. To provide a comprehensive picture of the volunteer units, the theoretical framework is based on practice theory. Such a theory provides an understanding of organisational phenomena by focusing on what members of a practice do, and explains how they make sense of what they are doing (Nicolini 2012, p. 7). According to the field, a practice is a routinized type of behaviour which consists of interconnected elements (Reckwitz 2002, p. 249). In this thesis, the practices in question are the volunteer units within two NGOs.

Theorists within the field perceive practices as structural systems that guide the interaction of its members (Nicolini 2012, p. 5). From this perspective, the structure of a volunteer unit is thereby created and upheld by its members, the coordinators and volunteers, who continuously re-produce norms and routines. By analysing the interview material, the aim is to uncover how coordinators and volunteers carry out their practice and make sense of what they are doing. In short, I want to analyse how and why coordinators and volunteers do what they do. Finally, this leads onto the research question:

- How do the members of volunteer units make sense of recruiting and retaining volunteers?

By answering this question, I will develop a deeper understanding of the problem of retaining volunteers. Such understanding is important in order to find out ways for how to successfully recruit and retain volunteers for a longer period.

1.3   Environmental non-governmental organisations

There is a wide range of sizes of environmental NGOs and different activities that they work with. In contrast to smaller NGOs, some of them attract media attention by chasing whalers in several oceans and work across borders on different matters such as wildlife conservation. The ideological and cultural orientations vary, seeing how some have their roots in for example deep ecology, while others began their journey in relation to the anti-nuclear movement in the 1970s. Additionally, NGOs are set apart by their differences in organisational culture. Processes of institutionalisation and bureaucratization have been undergone by many international NGOs and their organisational structures have developed into businesses. In comparison, others have stayed in their grass-root and social activist structures, from which most environmental NGOs stem from (Princen and Finger 1994, p. 7-8). In other words, environmental NGOs are very diverse, but also share similarities. NGOs are often seen as instruments for meeting community needs, promoting new policies and defend interests. Although the formal powers of most NGOs are few when it comes to international decision-making, some NGOs have for example been successful in promoting new environmental agreements (Paul 2000). It becomes clear that environmental NGOs have the possibility to influence a large number of people. Thus, they have a vital role to play in mobilising citizens to raise awareness of environmental issues. As previously discussed, one way of taking action is to volunteer.

1.4   Volunteering

When defining volunteering, some people argue that there is a difference between volunteering and activism. They mean that activists orient themselves towards social change, while volunteers focus more on improving individual issues. Thus, the concepts attract

different kinds of people, but the words also share the same meaning in many cases (Wilson 2000, p. 216-217). The different views of the concepts will be further discussed during the analysis in this thesis. However, to make it clear, because the respondents in my interviews talked about creating social change as well as improving environmental issues, this study takes the perspective of treating volunteering and activism as the same phenomenon. It follows the definition of volunteering as "any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group or cause" (Wilson 2000, p. 215). Volunteerism has several societal benefits, such as providing organisational and economic efficiency. It also promotes community and social cohesion since it brings people together from different backgrounds. For organisations to attract volunteers and keep them motivated, they need to understand volunteers' needs, wants and motivations (Shin and Kleiner 2003, p. 63-65).

As already mentioned, there is a lot of research based on motivational theory when it comes to why people volunteer. For example, studies show that people volunteer because of altruistic reasons, that is, to help other people or the society. Others have utilitarian motives, which concerns wanting something out of their experience, such as acquiring certain knowledge and new skills (Barron and Rihova 2011, p. 205). In addition to motivational research, there are several studies on why volunteers quit. For example, "in non-profit organisations, volunteer coordinators deal with high rates of volunteer turnover, due, in part, to increased levels of volunteer burnout" (Allen and Mueller 2013, p. 139). Because management is often considered as a significant aspect of how to recruit and retain volunteers, there has emerged a wide range of tips and guides for organisations on how volunteers should be managed (Bussell and Forbes 2002, p. 248). Despite the vast amount of motivational studies and development of volunteer programmes, many organisations still have difficulties with retaining their volunteers over a longer period (Bussell and Forbes 2002, p. 251).

2   Theoretical framework

2.1   Practice theory

When it comes to studying the nature of social phenomena, there has been an emergence of researchers over the past decades who challenge traditional theories that focus on either individual action or structural boundaries (Schatzki 1996, p. 1-2). One of the approaches to overcome this duality is called practice theory, which is about what members of a practice do, and how they make sense of what they are doing. While members keep their practice going, they simultaneously co-create structures that teach them what to feel, how to act and what to do. Such structures are normatively created and upheld as well as re-created within practices, guiding what the members do and say. Hence, practice theories view social structures and human agency as interdependently related, and regard practices as systems where acting and learning processes are inseparable (Nicolini 2012, p. 1-5). Theorists within the field define 'practice' in various ways and focus on different aspects of practices, which has led to the development of various concepts and analytical tools (Schatzki 2002, p. 71).

A practice is a routinized type of behaviour, consisting of several interconnected elements (Reckwitz 2002, p. 249), and can be seen as "a set of considerations that governs how people act" (Schatzki 1996, p. 96). As I understand it, an NGO can be analysed as a practice in itself. However, I am specifically interested in the volunteer units, that is, the departments of the organisations where coordinators and volunteers interact. Thus, I have chosen to define these departments as practices embedded in the larger organisations to which they belong, since the aim of the study is to provide a comprehensive picture of the volunteer units. To do this, I need to explore the relationship between the actors and analyse how they carry out their daily tasks. One of the authors within the field, Theodore Schatzki, has conducted research about how people make sense of their surroundings and developed a theory trying to explain why people do what they do (Nicolini 2012, p. 163). Since I want to analyse and explain how the coordinators and volunteers carry out and make sense of their practice, the theoretical framework for this study is based on Schatzki's view of practice theory.

2.2   Schatzki's three mechanisms

Schatzki raises criticism towards other authors within the field for focusing too much on either structural or intellectual aspects of what lies behind people's decision-making (Nicolini 2012, p. 164). Instead, he refers to sense-making. How things around us make sense is through their meaning, which formulated differently is what they are understood to be. Meaning cannot be constructed without understanding and vice versa. What something is understood to be is then expressed through both doings and sayings (Schatzki 1996, p. 111). Most of our doings and sayings are carried out without reflection rather than consciously. In short, people do what make sense for them to do depending on how they interpret their surroundings (Nicolini 2012, p. 163). How things make sense as well as what makes sense for people to do, is shaped by the structure of the practices that people are taking part of. Based on these insights, Schatzki divides the actions, namely the doings and sayings, that a practice consists of, into three different mechanisms which are linked to each other: (1) teleo-affective structure, (2) rules, and (3) understandings (Schatzki 1996, p. 103, 121, 126). There is more to Schatzki's view of practice theory, but I highlight the three mechanisms since they are the most relevant for analysing the volunteer units.

The first mechanism, *teleo-affective structure*, refers to the normative ideas of what members think ought to be done and the emotions in connection to this. To make it clear, 'teleo' concerns the normative purpose of the practice, while 'affective' is about the emotions which

arise in connection to the fulfilment/not fulfilment of that purpose. Therefore, depending on how a practice is thought to be carried out, it develops in a certain direction (Nicolini 2012, p. 166-167). The doings and sayings within a practice are linked by a teleo-affective structure in a way that expresses a hierarchical order of behaviours. This concerns for example ends, purposes, actions, projects, beliefs and emotions (Schatzki 1996, p. 100-101). The teleo-affective structure is created, learnt and upheld through socialisation which teaches members how to make sense of their practice. The structure is a property of the practice, not the property of members, since they embrace the teleo-affective structure when they learn the practice (Nicolini 2012, p. 167). Teleo-affective structures themselves do not govern activity, because how people act is guided by the sense-making that is formed during "the processes of learning and being trained and instructed to carry on the practices involved" (Schatzki 2002, p. 81). Explained differently, the sense-making of participants is shaped by the normativity that characterises a practice's teleo-affective structure. When there is a general agreement on what is and what is not acceptable within a practice, a teleo-affective structure exists. The agreement is re-created through the doings and sayings that members routinely carry out, and does not have to be outspoken or consciously reflected upon by the members (Ibid, p. 81, 83).

The second mechanism, *rules*, concerns explicit formulations, precepts, principles and instructions that direct people to perform specific actions (Schatzki 2002, p. 79). Rules can be seen as programmes of action and they specify what to do since members take them into account when they are carrying out their doings and sayings (Nicolini 2012, p. 166). Members of the same practice adhere to and take account of the same rules, and the notion of rules is closely interlinked with both the teleo-affective structure and understandings. The third mechanism, *understandings*, is about the understandings that connect the doings and sayings which compose the activities that are established within practices. This include being able to act and speak in the ways that are characteristic of the practice (Schatzki 1996, p. 100-103). Understandings also refer to "the knowing that derives from being a competent member of a practice" (Nicolini 2012, p. 165). To be a competent member means that both you and the other members know which of the doings and sayings that each of you are capable to perform (Schatzki 2002, p. 78-79).

Schatzki argues that the entirety of the organisational structure of a practice is normative. By normative he first and foremost means oughtness, or rightness. The three mechanisms, teleo-affective structure, rules, and understandings, "specify how actions (including speech acts) ought to be carried out, understood, prompted and responded to" (Schatzki 1996, p. 101). In other words, what ought to be done and how it should be done. As explained, a practice is a set of doings and sayings that are linked by a teleo-affective structure, rules, and understandings. If a doing or saying express components of a practice's organisation, it belongs to that practice. However, this is not to say that the same teleo-affective structure, rules, and understandings govern all the behaviours that are involved in a practice, since some actions might be connected to two or more overlapping practices at the same time (Ibid, p. 101-103). To understand why the coordinators and volunteers do what they do, I need to explore what characterises the organisations in terms of teleo-affective structure, rules, and understandings, and how these mechanisms affect the behaviour of the coordinators and volunteers. In my case, the practices in question are the volunteer unit within two environmental NGOs. Guided by Schatzki's three mechanisms, these are the practices that are analysed in the sections to come.

3 Methodology

In short, the aim of qualitative research is "exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell 2014, p. 32). In contrast, quantitative research is a way of testing theories by analysing the relationship between variables, favouring methods such as experiments and surveys. Therefore, qualitative research is more suitable when it comes to for example case studies (Ibid, p. 32). Since I have conducted a multiple case study and analysed people's subjective meanings, the research design of this thesis is qualitative. In addition, it has an interpretivist perspective since it aims at understanding, interpret and explain a social phenomenon (Bryman 2011, p. 32), aided by practice theory. There are different research approaches for how to make use of theory. In contrast to deduction which moves from theory to data, and induction which moves from data to theory, an abductive approach combines the two by moving back and forth in a systemic manner (Saunders et al. 2015, p. 148). Abduction often "begins with the observation of a surprising fact; it then works out a plausible theory of how this could have occurred" (Ibid, p. 148). Therefore, an abductive approach is particularly useful when the researcher wants to develop insight about a potential pattern in a social context (Dubois and Gadde 2002, p. 559). The research design of this study shows similarities to an abductive research process, because it has been developed by constantly moving between the empirical material and the theoretical framework. The results of the interviews are presented simultaneously as they are analysed, and the theory is used in the sense of exploring a pattern, that is, how and why coordinators and volunteers carry out their practice.

The interpretivist perspective and abduction stems from a constructivist worldview, which is an approach to qualitative research. From this perspective, people constantly seek to understand the world around them in which they work and live, and develop subjective meanings of what they are experiencing. People's experiences and interpretations of the contexts they live and work in lay the foundation for how the situation is being studied. Therefore, interview questions are most commonly constructed in a general and as open-ended way as possible (Creswell 2014, p. 37-38). In line with practice theory, constructivist research aims at interpreting and making sense of the meanings that people have about the contexts they are part of. Therefore, it becomes clear that the research design for this study is shaped by a constructivist worldview. An aspect to take into consideration is how I, the researcher, affect the research process. One of the reasons for why I am conducting this study is partly because the empirical problem behind the research question affects me in my own volunteerism. Since I have been active as a volunteer in environmental NGOs myself and some of my experiences are included in the introduction, I am aware that it becomes important for me to reflect on my bias. For example, this has made me prone to stay focused on the problem of people coming and going, increasing the risks of having prejudices about what kind of difficulties volunteer groups are facing. However, I would argue that this awareness mainly has affected me positively, since it has pushed me into staying as unbiased as possible when interviewing, and especially precise in following the theoretical framework when interpreting and analysing the empirical material.

3.1 Empirical material

Due to the limits of this thesis it was not possible to analyse more than two volunteer units. To show an as broad spectrum as possible, but still choose organisations that are similar enough to be compared, I did some research and contacted several different environmental NGOs. Because of practical reasons, I focused on Swedish organisations. I found that the organisational structures vary, and my aim was to find volunteer units where coordinators and volunteers work closely together. Two of the environmental NGOs that have attracted a large number of volunteers in Sweden both have staff members who coordinate their

volunteers through local volunteer groups. Thus, they were chosen for this study. Since I analyse the volunteer units, and not the organisations per se, they are anonymously labelled as NGO 1 and NGO 2 throughout the study. The purpose is to understand the sense-making of coordinators and volunteers by analysing how and why they do what they do. When the researcher aims at studying a social phenomenon in-depth by posing "how" and "why" questions, a qualitative case study is a relevant research strategy (Yin 2009, p. 1). Since this thesis concerns the volunteer units in two NGOs, it takes the form of a multiple case study.

Multiple case studies are more time consuming than single case studies, which is why some researchers argue that single cases are better at providing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon in question. However, the results of multiple case studies are often considered to be more robust and convincing since they allow a wider exploration of the research questions (Yin 2009, p. 45). My aim is to only look at the volunteer units, not the whole organisations, which is why I argue that a multiple case study is possible to conduct despite the time restraints of this thesis. In my view, in contrast with only analysing one case, two cases that have both similarities and differences broadens the exploration of sense-making of coordinators and volunteers. The study is based on representative or typical cases, also known as exemplifying cases (Bryman 2012, p. 70). With these kinds of cases, "the objective is to capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday or commonplace situation" (Yin 2009, p. 48). Such cases are chosen since they make it possible to exemplify a broader category of which they are a part of, providing a suitable context for examining key social processes (Bryman 2012, p. 70). The question of generalisability is discussed further on in the section about reliability and validity.

3.2 Interviews

Since this study relates to the constructivist worldview, it has been carried out by conducting qualitative interviews with open-ended questioning. A suitable method for this is semi-structured interviews, because they involve questions that are openly structured and often aimed at uncovering views and opinions (Creswell 2014, p. 240). I was interested in the interaction between the respondents, because when a person is participating in a practice, that person co-exists with others (Schatzki 1996, p. 105). Since I wanted to explore the normativity of the volunteer units and portray an as comprehensive picture as possible, I decided to conduct focus group interviews. This is a way of interviewing several people at the same time through group discussions (Creswell 2014, p. 240). It was not possible to interview all the members of each volunteer unit, which means that there is a risk that the ones who were not interviewed do not agree with what has been said during the interviews. Though, even if not every member was interviewed, the participants were at least given the possibility to discuss and contradict each other's views of the volunteer units. NGO 2 has about half as many active volunteers as NGO 1. Because NGO 1 is bigger than NGO 2, I interviewed six people from NGO 1 and three people from NGO 2. In total, I conducted and recorded four interviews. From NGO 1, I talked to two coordinators and four volunteers, and from NGO 2 I interviewed one coordinator and two volunteers.

In a focus group, the selected individuals participate in a group discussion that is focused on a certain topic which they have knowledge about and/or experience from. The researcher mainly has the role of making the group interaction easier rather than leading the discussion. The interaction between the interviewees helps the researcher understand the reasoning behind the interviewees thoughts and opinions, making it possible to study underlying factors. Hence, a good focus group generates data that not only covers *what* the participants are thinking, but also explains *why* they are thinking this way (Denscombe 2000, p. 268-269). The group effect can also produce insightful self-disclosure which might not be possible during one-one-on interviews, since participants can support each other and validate as well

as extend each other's emotions and experiences (Tracy 2013, p. 167). This is also one of the disadvantages with focus groups since there is a risk of group pressure and a situation where not everyone agrees with the opinions that are expressed, but not feel comfortable enough to speak up. In addition, even though the interviewer is bound by professional secrecy, the participants are not. This can lead to people not sharing personal thoughts since the interviewees can share with others what has been said after the interview (Trost 1993, p. 46-47). However, even though the group discussions can lead to consensus, they can also show important differences between the individuals which gives the researcher data about similar as well as different opinions within the group (Denscombe 2000, p. 270).

For group members to openly share their thoughts and opinions, it is important to create a trustful setting where they feel comfortable with the researcher as well as with each other (Denscombe 2000, p. 270). To create a good focus group, it is also required to strategically combine participants with similar others. If the group interview does not have a shared starting point, it will most likely emerge into a competition for talk time rather than a joint dialogue (Tracy 2013, p. 169). With this in mind, I decided it was good to conduct separate interviews with the coordinators and the volunteers. They are used to mostly work separately anyway, and I wanted to create a setting where they could express what they thought about the communication between coordinators and volunteers without the pressure of saying it directly in front of each other. Before the interviews started, I clearly explained that all participants would be anonymous and that the names of the NGOs would not be mentioned in the thesis. Apart from one individual phone interview, I conducted the focus group interviews at places where the coordinators work and where the volunteers usually have their meetings to further create an as comfortable environment as possible.

The interview guide was based on a number of themes and open-ended questions related to the theoretical framework, which changed along with how the interviews unfolded. Since I acted more as a moderator than an interviewer during the focus groups, the order of questions I posed depended on what the interviewees decided to talk about. However, I always made sure to ask follow-up questions and steer the discussions back to the topic if the respondents started to talk about something that was completely irrelevant for my research. According to Schatzki, the vocabulary that is used by members of a practice when describing their activities is often a significant clue to how their practice is constituted. One way of revealing what a person thinks and feels about his or her practice, is to ask why and how questions about the person's behaviour (Schatzki 1996, p. 113, 118). The interviews began with simple start-up questions to make the interviewees comfortable. Then, to be in line with practice theory, the questions basically concerned what they do, how they do it, and what they feel about it. Even though one interview was done by phone and the number of respondents varied between the three focus groups, I practically followed the same interview guide. However, the topics that were discussed varied a bit. For example, a difference between the two volunteer groups was that the volunteers from NGO 2 were older than the volunteers from NGO 1, leading them to talk a lot about past experiences. On the other hand, this variation gives me the opportunity to shed light on different views amongst volunteers.

3.3   Analytical approach

Apart from not including disfluencies, the interviews were fully transcribed. In order to develop an understanding about how the members of volunteer units make sense of recruiting and retaining volunteers, the material was then structured according to an open coding process. This means that the material is re-read and re-categorised several times (Crang and Cook 2007, p. 120-121). The codes, or categories, are created and simultaneously developed as the material is interpreted in relation to theory (Bryman 2012, p. 527-528). When coding, I created six categories, two per each mechanism. To repeat, the mechanisms are called *teleo-*

affective structure, *rules*, and *understandings*. The categories were developed by moving back and forth between the interview material and my personal interpretation of the theoretical framework. To further help me in the process, I constructed an analytical question which I posed to the material during my analysis: What characterises the practices in terms of teleo-affective structure, rules, and understandings?

The first mechanism, teleo-affective structure, was divided into two categories: *hidden aim* and *emotions*. The hidden aim is about what members think ought to be done, the purpose of what they are doing. Emotions are about the thoughts and feelings connected to the fulfilment/not fulfilment of this purpose. Schatzki clearly states that the second mechanism, rules, includes explicit rules (Schatzki 2002, p. 79). He also writes that it is closely interlinked with the two other mechanisms since it connects to normatively correct ways of how actions should be carried out (Schatzki 1996, p. 103). Therefore, I divided the second mechanism into two categories as well: *explicit rules* and *implicit rules*. In the analysis, I highlight the implicit ones, since explicit rules are more self-explanatory. Explicit rules cover aspects such as official guidelines and instructions. In contrast, implicit rules include the unspoken rules within the volunteer units. For example, the volunteers from NGO 2 explained that they do not have to tell their coordinator about upcoming plans. This strongly connects to the third mechanism, understandings, because rules are carried out depending on how they are practically understood (Nicolini 2012, p. 166).

The third mechanism was also divided into two categories: *tasks* and *competences*. Understandings of tasks are connected to how participants practically understand what to do, how to carry out their tasks. Understandings include being able to act and speak in ways that are characteristic of the practice (Schatzki 1996, p. 100), which is about being a competent member of the practice. Hence, the second category concerns competences, which I translate to understandings of and unspoken expectations about important competences within the practice. For example, what kind of characteristics that are expected from you to have as a coordinator or volunteer to be a competent member of your volunteer unit. Both tasks and competences are strongly linked to the teleo-affective structure since understandings are carried out in relation to what members of a practice think ought to be done (Schatzki 2002, p. 81). With the help of the six categories, the empirical material has been de-constructed and re-structured. As mentioned earlier, I operationalise the volunteer units as two different practices, and therefore make a division between NGO 1 and NGO 2 when presenting the analysis.

3.4 Reliability and validity

When evaluating social research, reliability and validity are two prominent criteria to consider. In comparison with quantitative research such as statistical tables, qualitative research shows strength through descriptive narratives. However, along with this comes the questions of reliability since qualitative research often is criticised for inconsistency (Silverman 2015, p. 20). In short, reliability concerns the question if the results of the research are repeatable or not (Bryman 2012, p. 46-47). If a qualitative study on the other hand lacks validity, this could be because the researcher for example has decided to only use certain parts of interview transcripts to construct preferred conclusions and avoided discussing contradictory data (Silverman 2015, p. 21). I have thoroughly followed a consistent pattern when conducting, transcribing and coding the interviews, based on the theoretical framework. To make sure that my study does not become inconsistent, I have been as transparent as possible about my data collection, the coding procedure and explained how the theoretical framework is systematically used in the analysis.

Another aspect is external validity, also called generalisability, which is about the potential of a study to be generalised beyond its specific research context (Bryman 2012, p. 47). This is one of the most common concerns with case studies. The short answer to this is that "case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions, and not populations or universes" (Yin 2009, p. 9). Case studies concern analytical generalisation, not statistical, since the researcher strives to provide a deeper understanding by generalising case results in relation to theory. In other words, a case study is not about producing a sample that is to be fully representative in a broader context (Ibid, p. 9). In addition, some authors argue that learning from single cases is more of a strength than a weakness, because "the interaction between a phenomenon and its context is best understood through in-depth case studies" (Dubois and Gadde 2002, p. 554). Therefore, I would argue that this study contributes to the field, seeing how it gives valuable insight into two different environmental NGOs.

4   Analysis

The presentation of the analysis is divided into two parts: NGO 1 and NGO 2. Each volunteer unit is presented by a short introduction to the coordinators' and volunteers' doings and sayings. In other words, a description of what they do and what they say they do. In line with the theoretical framework, the rest of the findings are divided into three parts: (1) teleo-affective structure, (2) rules, and (3) understandings. Despite analysing the same kind of practice in both organisations, I divided the analysis this way since the volunteer units do not look the same. Even though each mechanism is presented separately, it is important to have in mind that the mechanisms are interlinked. *Rules* are carried out depending on how they are practically understood. In turn, *understandings* are carried out in relation to the *teleo-affective structure* (Nicolini 2012, p. 165-166). Therefore, to make the interlinkages understandable, each analysis of the volunteer units is concluded by a final section. In the text below, information and quotes that do not have literature references are based on the answers from the four interviews. Three of the interviews were in Swedish, and one in English. Since I have translated the Swedish quotes, the originals can be found in the appendix.

I have interpreted Schatzki's view of practice theory and decided what to focus on when analysing the mechanisms. As explained in the theoretical framework, the *teleo-affective* structure is what characterises a practice, not what characterises the members of a practice. New members that join the practice learn how to become competent members step by step and thereby learn what to do and say. The members are guided by *rules* and *understandings*, which make them carriers of the practice they are a part of. The teleo-affective structure is the unspoken and hidden aim of the practice, what members think ought to be done. The members' understandings of what they are doing and saying, their sense-making, is connected to this hidden aim. It is possible that what ought to be done is linked to and overlap with the official aims of the two NGOs, but not necessarily. The members' understandings of rules, themselves, each other and their roles within their practice, is also connected to the teleo-affective structure. In turn, the aim is carried out and re-produced by the doings and sayings.

4.1   NGO 1 – Doings and sayings

NGO 1 has two coordinators who are responsible for the volunteers in Sweden. The majority of the volunteers belong to local groups in different towns and represent the organisation at the local level. Each volunteer group has one or two group contact persons, and they are the ones who mostly are in contact with the coordinators. The coordinators have set a clear division between their roles when it comes to the responsibility of the local groups, but sometimes they need to help each other out. They have also divided some tasks when it comes to carrying out campaigns, working with programs and developing material, such as being responsible for their online community. The most common way to become a volunteer is to go to the organisation's website and enter your contact information. By doing so, you will be contacted by the group contact person of the local group that is closest to where you live. Once you are contacted, you get an invitation to a meeting where you get introduced to what it means to be a volunteer, such as what activities the local groups do, the campaigns that are going on and what the values of the organisation are. Apart from coordinating the local groups and motivate the volunteers, the coordinators develop and produce material such as policies, manuals and tool-kits for the volunteers. The coordinators often get direct requests from people who ask what and when they can do things for the organisation. Tasks that need to be done can be anything from writing letters and do research for a campaign, to join the workshop and help making an inventory or building stuff. You can also become an activist and take part in activities and actions of all sorts.

The volunteers from the local group I interviewed have their meetings weekly, either in person or online. They have roles in the group such as being responsible for social media or book rooms for their meetings. Because the rate of activity goes up and down quite a lot, if the volunteers meet up or not depends on how many people that are available and what kind of actions that are coming up. If volunteers leave the group they are still contacted if more people are needed for a campaign, because the volunteers that live in the same area sometimes show up for activities even if they are not regularly attending the group meetings. They often have an agenda before the meetings, and to make sure that the group agrees on decisions they arrange the meetings when most of the group members are available. As one volunteer said: *"So then it's more of a decision of the group and not just 2 out of 15 people"*. The coordinators described the communication with the group contact persons as quite intense. They inform them about upcoming actions on a weekly basis either online or, if the volunteer group is closely located to the head office, in person. The volunteers contact the coordinators whenever they need to. They described the coordinators as very supportive and *"open for listening and taking criticism"*. In the past, the volunteers have for example received help when it comes to group members who have not behaved respectfully.

4.1.1 Teleo-affective structure

The interviewees from NGO 1 talked a lot about how volunteers are the foundation of the organisation, how important they are for the organisation's existence. The coordinators explained that it is the way the organisation was created, by volunteers, and that this is one of the reasons for why they have been successful over the years. For example, one coordinator said that *"this organisation would not have been anything, our heart, our core is built by our volunteers"* and in a similar manner a volunteer stated that *"the organisation wouldn't do without us, so we're a vital part of the organisation"*. The coordinators talked about engaging the volunteers, but also highlighted the importance of focusing on the official goals of the organisation at the same time:

"...developing plans for how to engage the volunteer groups, or rather, how we can be a part of winning campaigns and help the organisation, because, I don't know why I express myself that way, but that is our bible in a way, the priorities and in some way fulfilling our purpose in the organisation."

The coordinators said that they work as representatives for the volunteers towards the rest of the organisation and that it is important for them to understand the volunteer groups' situation. They want to support the volunteers and make sure that they are being heard by including them in discussions with other teams at the head office when for example planning an upcoming campaign. The coordinators want to make sure that the volunteers feel like what they are doing is meaningful and that their contribution helps the organisation. For example, one of the coordinators feels the most happy and proud when a volunteer group is working on something and is satisfied with the outcome. It shows that the volunteers have had a good experience with the NGO and that they have done something worthwhile. The coordinators told me about a survey they conducted a couple of years ago about why people stop volunteering. There were several different reasons, and one of them concerned that people leave when they feel that there is not much going on. Other important factors are the social, and the feeling of being seen. If you are a part of a group that is located far away from the head office and not much is happening in your group, this can lead to less motivation and a feeling of not being appreciated. In addition, one coordinator reasoned that it is not often that people stop having the will to change things, but when they join NGO 1 they might realise after a while that they do not feel that it is the right platform for them, *"and then we have failed"*.

According to the volunteers, the goal of their local group is to make more people join the environmental movement in the large sense and be a platform for making a difference when it comes to environmental issues. They see this as a long-term process, and they want to inform people about the organisation's causes and campaigns, and make more people environmentally engaged. To achieve this, they expressed the need of having a stable core group:

"I think it's really important for these kinds of groups to have a stable core that's actually a group and not just a couple of people, or like five-ish, and then some people can come and go, and join in for campaigns and stuff, but as long as you have some kind of core, I think otherwise it's hard to keep it going."

This topic re-occurred several times during the focus group. According to the volunteers, if there is a well-functioning dynamic in the group, then it is easier for new people that arrive to see that people know each other and that activities are happening. The volunteer group both has difficulties with creating a core group and making people stay. One volunteer said that *"I think that's a question that troubles a lot of NGOs, how to make people stay"* and another interviewee continued by talking about how people frequently come and go, most likely because the group is organising themselves around specific things that are happening, such as campaigns. In between, when not much is going on, it is probably then people decide to leave. The volunteers discussed what you need to do to build a core group, concluding that you need to focus on social activities to become friends. This could lead to people seeing the regular meetings as hanging out with friends and not just perform volunteer tasks, which would be a meaningful way of attending the meetings even if there is not much to do. The volunteers explained that it takes a lot of time and energy to build a concept regarding a campaign. When you are a small number of people it takes even more energy. Because the group has ranged from being 2 to 22 people in different periods over the last year, the coming and going of people makes the volunteers feel frustrated and leave them with a sense of not being able to fulfil their aims of engaging more people and becoming known for making a change. At the same time, all the volunteers agreed that it still feels rewarding to be a part of the group since you get a lot of energy, and is provided with a sense of purpose when you do things you are passionate about together with people who share your values. For example, one interviewee said:

"I'm really always looking forward to do something. So, it doesn't feel like, even when one gets depressed about oh my God this is such a huge issue to tackle with, then you always think but yeah, there are some great awesome people that keep on fighting and that's so motivating."

The coordinators care a lot about the volunteers and their outspoken aim is to support them. However, it also becomes apparent that they heavily depend on their volunteers since it is with the help of them they can carry on with their campaigns and fulfil the official aims of NGO 1. This appears to be the coordinators' hidden aim, the 'teleo' part of the teleo-affective structure. That is, trying to balance between working towards the goals of the organisation by winning campaigns, while simultaneously support the volunteers by making sure that they are happy and satisfied when being active within the organisation. This balancing is not a part of the coordinators' official job description, which makes it a hidden aim. When they fulfil this purpose by for example coordinating a volunteer group that is satisfied with a project, the coordinators feel happy and proud, revealing the 'affective' part of the structure. The volunteer group seems focused on creating a more stable core. To accomplish this they need more people, and they need to make sure that they stay active for a longer period. Although the volunteers' outspoken aims are about environmental issues, my analysis shows that their hidden aim concerns building a core group. This is not an outspoken task, but a task which the volunteers have assigned themselves. It appears that the volunteers adhere to the

same teleo-affective structure as the coordinators, since they also try to balance fulfilling the official aims regarding environmental issues, while simultaneously trying to create a core group to retain their group members. Since the volunteers do not accomplish this, they keep feeling frustrated.

4.1.2 Rules

Most of the coordinators' working days consist of meetings in different teams at the office, which concern both the national and international levels. Since NGO 1 is a global organisation, there are some international guidelines that need to be followed. If a volunteer group has an idea they want to follow up, they need to contact their volunteer coordinator and ask if they can use the official logo of NGO 1. One volunteer explained that *"it's not like it's no, you can't do this, it's not like that, it's just that you have to follow some rules"*. One volunteer described an idea his/her group had a while back that did not get accepted by NGO 1. Since they could not use the official logo, it made volunteers in the group less motivated and resulted in them not going forward with the idea at all. However, all the volunteers seem to accept the dismissal of their idea since they explained that they find it good to have these guidelines. According to them, it gives credibility to the organisation. NGO 1 has values that the volunteers want to follow, because *"otherwise it's not NGO 1, that makes sense"*.

The analysis of the teleo-affective structure showed that the volunteers take on a lot of responsibility, and the coordinators expect them to do so. It is not an explicit rule of the organisation, but the members still adhere to this norm, making it an implicit rule. The coordinators assign the volunteers responsibility through coordinating them in local volunteer groups. They said that it becomes difficult for them when people do not live close to a group, since they then need to find ways to offer a meaningful way of engagement on a case-by-case basis. The coordinators see this as a flaw which they are not sure of how to fix. Basically, they mainly engage volunteers who live in the cities where they have local groups, stating that *"this is the way we are organised, that is how our logic works"*. This can be regarded as an implicit rule, because if the coordinators were to perceive the organising of volunteers in a different way, they might have talked about the fact that there are people all over the country who want to volunteer in a more positive manner. Currently, the need of volunteers is organised in accordance to local groups, making active people outside of these groups more of an issue than an asset. Thus, an implicit rule seems to be that volunteers should be geographically close to each other, so they together as a group can become committed to the aims of NGO 1. A coherent group with volunteers who know each other well, and feel engaged and committed to the aims of the NGO also in periods when there are less things to do, is clearly more controllable for the coordinators than scattered volunteers all over the country. The volunteer groups are expected to be committed to the cause even though the coordinators cannot offer campaigns in a constant manner. At the same time, the explicit rules are strict, which makes it difficult for the volunteers to come up with own projects and fulfil their aim of being known for making a change.

4.1.3 Understandings

The coordinators discussed the fact that volunteers come and go, saying that the numbers depend on what is happening in the world and what currently creates engagement: *"I mean, the world still needs to be saved even when we don't have a campaign, but the results don't get as concrete"*. When the coordinators have less tasks to offer their volunteers, the rate of activity goes down. Because of this, they must remain perceptive and be prepared to adapt to the situation. The coordinators see their roles as very dynamic, and one of them described their work as being *"a lot about, like, getting a ball thrown at you from the side, and then try to do something with this ball"*. They also talked about their work as both challenging and fun, and that focusing on soft values has led to a great work environment with honesty, transparency, trust, integrity and an emphasis on having a good time working together. The

coordinators said that some parts of the organisation are very centralised with projects that have distinct boundaries, whereas the other side of the spectrum concerns more flexible, volunteer initiated activities. A big part of their work is to develop material and structures that support the volunteers, which they argue mainly should happen together with the volunteers. They also said that they want to get better at supporting volunteer initiated projects and become more resilient when dealing with the fluctuating number of active volunteers.

The volunteer group which I interviewed has existed for about two years and managed to be involved in many different campaigns during this time. The volunteers told me that they are expected to push campaigns by representing the organisation's values and spread its message. They said that they see themselves as doing a lot of the work in NGO 1 when it comes to making actions happen and mobilising people to address both local and global issues. According to my analysis, the volunteers' understandings of their practice also include how they understand their own roles. They discussed the differences between the words volunteer and activist, and had various interpretations. One of the volunteers did not like the word volunteer, arguing that it makes people think *"that you're just doing something that you're fooled to not being paid for, which is not the case at all"*. Although some of them prefer the word volunteers while others rather call themselves activists, they shared a similar view when it comes to how they use the concepts within the organisation. Volunteers are the ones that are active in local groups, whereas activists do more of the international actions that attract media attention and sometimes involve legal risks. They said that activism can be incorporated into volunteering, but officially they use the word volunteers since they see it as more inclusive, so new members *"don't imagine that we do crazy stuff, even though maybe some of us do, but so they can slowly learn how it works and they will see that anybody can be an activist"*.

It becomes clear that the volunteers understand their role as important when it comes to doing actions within the organisation. They do not want to be portrayed as being fooled to work for free, and I assume the coordinators are aware of this seeing how much they care about their volunteers. The coordinators understand their roles in relation to the teleo-affective structure by valuing involvement of the volunteers, create transparency within the organisation and make sure that the volunteers are feeling seen. It seems as this could be one way of dealing with the risk of volunteers being seen as fooled to work for free. Hence, an important skill to have as a member of the practice is to make sure that volunteers are not portrayed this way. According to my analysis, in order to be a competent member of this volunteer unit, the coordinators and volunteers must understand that NGO 1 is dependent on volunteers. They also need to understand that volunteers need to feel appreciated if they are to stay committed, and that if they manage to create strong core groups of volunteers, the volunteers will feel engaged and stay committed even during periods when the rate of activity is low.

4.1.4 Linking the three mechanisms

The coordinators have many tasks apart from working with campaigns and are satisfied with their work environment. In contrast, the volunteers become less motivated since they do not have much to do between the campaigns. In addition, they feel frustrated because volunteers frequently come and go. The outspoken aim of the volunteer group is to be a platform for engagement and make more people environmentally engaged by informing people about the organisation's causes and campaigns. However, their hidden aim is to create a core group, since they fail to fulfil their outspoken aim when they have too few group members. My analysis shows that this can be described as the teleo-affective structure which the volunteer unit is guided by. The coordinators try to keep a balance between fulfilling the official goals of NGO 1, and at the same time support the members of the volunteer groups. The volunteers also try to keep a balance between fulfilling the official goals, and support each other by

trying to build a core group. The coordinators want to become better at supporting the volunteers during periods when they do not have campaigns to offer, by for example enhancing volunteer-initiated projects. The volunteers tried to initiate such a project in a period between campaigns, but were not allowed to use the logo and did not follow up on their idea. The analysis of rules showed that the volunteers adhere to the official guidelines of the organisation. By accepting the rules, this shows that they have learned the skills needed to be a competent member of the practice. For example, as a volunteer, if you do not accept the rules, you will probably become frustrated when you are not allowed to carry out certain projects, and possibly leave.

By re-producing the teleo-affective structure in accordance to their roles, it becomes difficult for both coordinators and volunteers to recruit and retain volunteers, revealing a dilemma. They are trying to balance working towards the aims of the organisation by adhering to the rules, and simultaneously support the volunteers by becoming better at endorsing volunteer-initiated projects, but are restrained by the guidelines of NGO 1. The coordinators do not always have activities to offer for the local groups, so they need to offer something else if the volunteers are to stay in the organisation. The analysis shows that they handle this issue by working with soft values such as transparency, trust and team-building. According to the understanding that members of this practice have, this is what they need to strive for. They need to do so if they are going to keep people motivated and create a platform where they can offer a sense of working together towards something. This partly satisfies the volunteers, who said that it still feels meaningful to be a part of the group even if they do not always have things to do. If the volunteers were to build friendships and create a stronger core, this would possibly make more people stay committed even during periods of less activity, leading to volunteers feeling satisfied with being engaged in the volunteer group.

4.2   NGO 2 – Doings and sayings

NGO 2 has local volunteer groups in a number of Swedish cities. Apart from joining one of these groups, you can become a part of one of the organisations' committees, join an activist group, become an informant, take part in different campaigns or sign up at their trainee program. They are three persons at the head office who have divided the responsibility of the volunteer groups in Sweden, and the coordinator that I talked to is responsible for the local group that I interviewed. To stay in contact with the volunteer group, the coordinator takes part of the group's board minutes. Additionally, he/she is also connected to a mailing list which means that all the e-mails that the volunteers send to each other, the coordinator can read. The coordinator explained that NGO 2 arranges four national meetings per year where they try to create a forum where volunteers can meet and exchange experiences, inspire each other and feel that they are a part of the organisation's national and international movement. The volunteers that I interviewed have taken part in these meetings several times.

To become an official member of NGO 2 you must pay a member fee, but not necessarily when you first join a local volunteer group. The volunteer group I talked to has been more and less active in periods since they were originally formed more than 20 years ago, but they started to have regular meetings again every other week about 4-5 years ago. During the meetings, they often have an agenda to follow. For the most part, they discuss ongoing activities in groups and report to each other how things are going. When it comes to people that are non-active members of NGO 2, the volunteer group makes sure that they for example send out invitations to upcoming meetings and remind them of the group's existence. If the group is planning an action or a campaign, they usually contact other organisations that are interested in the same issue. Since the volunteer group collaborate with several other organisations, they also take part in meetings that are organised by them. Additionally, the volunteers often attend different kinds of network meetings in the interest of spreading

information about what they are doing. On these occasions, they set up an information table with forms and leaflets.

4.2.1 Teleo-affective structure

According to the coordinator, his/her aim is to create an inclusive, welcoming and accessible platform for engagement. I was told that this is a kind of balance between creating activism and supporting activism, since the role for example includes being there for existing volunteers as well as introducing new ones. In connection to this, the coordinator described the feeling of not doing enough, explaining that *"you often feel that you are quite inadequate, because there is always more that you can do in everything you do"*. This feeling was linked to the fact that they are few people who work at the head office, and they have very limited resources which leads to a stressful work environment. What also affects how the coordinator feels when it comes to fulfilling the goals, is that it is not possible to measure activism. At least not in the same way as you can measure how much money the organisation has collected in a year, *"because people come and go, people stop being engaged but new ones start to become engaged, so it's, it's a difficult question, I think it goes up and down"*.

The coordinator talked about how many active volunteers they have and explained that the number increases and decreases in turns, as in waves. According to him/her, a part of the role is to motivate volunteers to keep on being active, and one way of being motivated is to be a part of a volunteer group that is socially well-functioning. The coordinator explained that most of the activities that you do as a volunteer is together with other people which makes the social part especially important, and continued by talking about possible reasons for why people stop being active volunteers. One reason could be that if a person does not feel included in their local group, or does not feel comfortable socially, this could be a starting point for wanting to stop. Several of the volunteers from the local group that I interviewed, have been active for more than two or three decades. One of them explained that he/she joined the group because of knowing people that were already active. With the help of friendship, more people have joined during the years and eventually formed a stable core group. They are about 7-8 volunteers who attend the meetings in a regular manner, but they are also in contact with other persons that join if the group has a need for it, explaining that *"it's usually a small number of people that run the group, who meet up regularly, and then there are other people who support us"*.

The volunteers stated that their aim is to make the world a better place by contributing to sustainable development. They also see a part of their goal to make sure that the interest in and knowledge about sustainable development and environmental issues continues to live on through generations, so they mostly focus on spreading information. In connection to this, they said that they feel like they are far from reaching accomplishment. They continued to discuss how they at least think that they are contributing to stopping or slowing down negative development: *"If we had not stood in the way, this little group, things would have been even worse"*. In a similar manner as the coordinator, the volunteers explained that they feel that it is difficult to measure their activism and what impact they have in the larger sense. For example, they have been taking part in the movement of making the city centre where they are located car free. The city centre is far from car free, but there has emerged a greater focus on building bike roads over the years. Even though it is impossible to tell if there is a certain group of people that is the actual cause for the change or not, the volunteers said they feel like they have contributed to this positive development.

The rate of activity within the volunteer group fluctuates, but it has steadily decreased during the last decades. However, my analysis shows that the activism itself gives the volunteers a sense of meaning. Even though success does not define every day, the volunteers expressed how valuable it still feels to be a part of the local group and the environmental movement.

When talking about challenges they are facing, they said that one of them is to get people interested. The volunteers rarely contact people actively and ask if they want to join them, so when there is an upcoming activity, they consider networking to be important. Sometimes new people arrive at a meeting but are never seen again because they joined another organisation instead. It does not mean that this is a problem for the group, because one of the volunteers said:

> *"We don't care that much if you're a member of NGO 2 or not, what matters is that you're active regarding the issue, so we'd rather collaborate with another organisation than attract people to us, so it's not a goal to convert the world to NGO 2."*

The goal of contributing to sustainable development appears to be too ambitious for the volunteer group, since they said that they are far from accomplishing their outspoken aim. However, they still appear to be satisfied with what they do. Here, the teleo-affective structure becomes visible. According to my analysis, their hidden aim is to keep on doing what they already do. Phrased differently, what they think ought to be done is to maintain status quo. Activism is difficult to measure and it becomes nearly impossible for the volunteers to see how their efforts affect the outcome. Still, they feel like they are contributing by making sure that things do not get worse. By spreading information and collaborating with other organisations they achieve their hidden aim, and thus feel good about what they are doing. The coordinator is also guided by the same teleo-affective structure, which becomes clearer in the next section.

4.2.2   Rules

The coordinator said that he/she perceives the local volunteer groups as very independent, especially the group that I interviewed. The group I talked to agrees with this view since they are used to do things on they own, arguing that it is hard to see what the people at the head office can do for them when it comes to local issues. In relation to this, both the coordinator and the volunteers described NGO 2 as a decentralised organisation. When larger campaigns are coming up, the coordinator sends information to the group, but apart from that and the monthly newsletter, they do not have much contact. This spring, the local group was visited by a couple of people from the head office for the first time. Otherwise most of the contact takes place by e-mail, and the coordinator is in contact with the group once a month if nothing special happens to simply check how they are doing.

The volunteers rarely contact the coordinator or the head office. They said that they do not feel pressure from the head office or need to ask for permission when they want to do activities, and they do not need to inform the coordinator about upcoming plans. This way of doing the job and keeping contact is not part of any official guidelines. Thus, it is an implicit rule about volunteers not having to inform the coordinator about what they want to do. The decision-making in the volunteer group is based on consensus. They have divided some roles in the group, such as for example a contact person and a secretary, but they would not say that they have a group leader of some sort. This shows that there is an implicit rule in the volunteer group about how the decision-making should work.

It appears that NGO 2 has a decentralised organisational structure. The aim of the coordinator is to support the volunteers, and my analysis shows that he/she interprets the implicit rules by not contacting the group more frequently than once a month. Since the volunteer group works a lot on their own, both the coordinator and the volunteers perceive the group as very independent. In relation to the analysis of the teleo-affective structure, the coordinator expressed a feeling of inadequacy and being stressed. They are too few people at the head office to deal with their tasks. Therefore, it becomes helpful for the coordinators to have a decentralised structure, since it leads to more independent local groups. If the volunteers do

not have to ask for permission when planning actions, the coordinators do not have to put too much energy into communicating with the local groups. By re-producing the teleo-affective structure, the coordinator and volunteers adhere to the rules in a usual manner, maintaining status quo.

4.2.3 Understandings

The coordinator explained that they have a newsletter that is sent out to the organisation's members once a month. It includes what is going on, such as upcoming activities, and highlights selected volunteers and their actions. The monthly contact which the coordinator has with the volunteer group is mainly connected to this newsletter. Sometimes, the local group takes part of national campaigns. On such occasions, they often receive an e-mail with information about what kind of people that are needed or tasks that volunteers can sign up for. When it comes to how they are carrying out their tasks, one volunteer said that they *"don't need to talk that much because it's almost obvious what you're supposed to do, it's more about if anyone wants to or has the energy for it"*. The volunteers argued that a lot of people think that environmental organisations only initiate conflicts, take part in demonstrations and aim at receiving media attention. The volunteer group does not relate to this image at all, and focus on sharing information to debunk such prejudices. However, one volunteer stated that *"we are not missionaries"*, since they do not actively go out and look for new members. Instead, they share information with the ones who show interest, explaining that *"the ones who really take a closer look at NGO 2 understand that there is substantial knowledge and research, and that there are many of us who work with different environmental projects academically"*.

The volunteers said that the words volunteer and activist are vague concepts and that you use them differently depending on the context. For example, one of them sees volunteers as regular members of NGO 2 whereas activists are the ones taking part in campaigns and actions. The other volunteer said: *"Linguistically, during the 20th century you never heard volunteer in this context. Now it's called volunteer and that means to do something voluntarily, so lately I've started to use that as well"*. The coordinator did not want to use the word volunteer at all, arguing that activism is what defines NGO 2 as an organisation, not volunteering. According to him/her, the word volunteer means working for someone else or work for free. Activism on the other hand is an identity, because *"you're not just coming here and do volunteer work for us three times a week, rather, you are an activist"*. When describing the volunteer group, one of the volunteers said:

"It's not like we have the energy, I mean, like what, should we climb some chimney or something like that? Maybe the media would take interest then, but otherwise it's not like we, we are more like some kind of assiduous workers in the vineyard."

My analysis shows that in order to be a competent member of NGO 1, you need to see activism as a part of your identity. This becomes clear since the coordinator expects the volunteers to keep on working with what they are doing on their own. If the volunteers have this competence, the coordinator does probably not have to motivate and push the volunteers as much, and can focus on other tasks instead. To be a competent member of the local group, you should know what you are supposed to do, and adhere to the norm of consensus. Since the volunteers know each other well and are guided by the teleo-affective structure of keeping on as usual, they do not focus on recruiting new group members. If new people were to become part of the group, these people would instantly have to get to know the other volunteers and learn how to behave in the group. Otherwise, they would most likely not be comfortable socially, and perhaps not want to stay active.

4.2.4 Linking the three mechanisms

The teleo-affective structure of the volunteer unit shows that the hidden aim of the coordinators and volunteers is to keep on doing what they do, maintaining status quo. Because the coordinator has a lot of other things to do, he/she continues to treat the volunteer group as independent, adhering to the decentralised structure. Even if the local group reflected upon how volunteering is decreasing and needs people to perform activities, the group does not prioritise recruiting new volunteers. The implicit rules and understandings in connection to the teleo-affective structure explain why the volunteers do not make any certain efforts to recruit more people, but rather keep on working like usual. The volunteers have found a way of making sense of not accomplishing their outspoken aim by understanding themselves as "assiduous workers in the vineyard", spreading information and collaborating with other organisations. By taking part in the practice, they have learnt who they are and what they should do to be competent members. To be a competent member of this volunteer unit, the coordinator and volunteers must see activism as a part of their identity, and be able to work separately without too much time-consuming contact with each other.

According to the coordinator, the social factor in volunteer groups is important. The analysis shows that because the volunteers seem to know each other well and already have a strong core group, the coordinator perceives this local group as particularly independent. Thanks to their stable core, the volunteers do not see it as a problem if people come and go since they are more concerned about maintaining status quo. It does not really matter to them if people are a part of NGO 2 or not, as long as they stay active within the environmental movement. Furthermore, seeing how their strategy is to collaborate with other organisations when doing activities, they are not as dependent on the number of people in their actual group. It makes sense for the volunteers to focus on collaboration since it makes it possible for them to have a larger number of people at hand when they need it. In turn, this helps them in their work with trying to fulfil their outspoken aim of contributing to sustainable development.

5   Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to provide a deeper understanding of how volunteer units work, in order to find out ways of how to successfully recruit and retain volunteers for a longer period. Guided by Schatzki's three mechanisms, *teleo-affective structure*, *rules*, and *understandings*, I have explained the sense-making of coordinators and volunteers regarding how and why they do what they do. By answering the research question about how the members of volunteer units make sense of recruiting and retaining volunteers, the analysis has resulted in a comprehensive picture of the volunteer units within two environmental NGOs.

The teleo-affective structure of NGO 1 shows that both the coordinators and volunteers balance between trying to fulfil the official goals of the organisation and simultaneously support volunteers. Because the volunteers have difficulties with retaining group members, they prioritise building a core group. With such a core, it would be possible for the volunteers to focus on their outspoken aim of making a change. NGO 1 has a centralised organisational structure with guidelines such as when their official logo can be used or not. In between campaigns, the coordinators do not have many activities to offer, making the activity rate go down. The volunteer group wants to stay active, but is hindered by strict guidelines when trying to initiate own projects. The coordinators and volunteers make sense of the situation by striving for creating a sense of working together towards something. By focusing on soft values and building friendships, they try to make volunteers feel satisfied even during less busy periods.

In accordance with the teleo-affective structure of the volunteer unit of NGO 2, the members keep on doing what they do. The volunteers have a strong core group, and maintain status quo by not prioritising recruiting new volunteers. They make sense of their outspoken aim of contributing to sustainable development by focusing on spreading information and collaborating with other organisations. NGO 2 has more of a decentralised organisational structure, and both the coordinator and volunteers perceive the local group as very independent. In comparison to NGO 1, the local group from NGO 2 has existed for a long time. Hence, they have had time to build friendships and create a stable core. They have also managed to network with other organisations for many years, which makes it possible for them to focus on collaboration.

To conclude, it is difficult for volunteer groups to retain their members if they do not have a strong core group. On the other hand, it can be challenging to recruit new volunteers for groups that consist of people who know each other well and do not prioritise attracting new people. Personally, being a volunteer myself, I would argue that this study has provided important insights into how volunteer units work, and what kind of challenges coordinators and volunteers currently are facing. For future research, it would be interesting to take a closer look at the importance of building core groups, and how volunteer groups can create better settings for recruiting and retaining group members. Seeing how environmental NGOs generally work for the same cause, it could also be valuable to explore what possibilities there are for volunteer units to collaborate, such as platforms where coordinators and volunteers from different environmental NGOs can meet and exchange experiences with each other.

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Appendix

This is a list of all the quotes that were translated from Swedish to English. Since one interview was in English, the quotes from that interview are not included in the appendix.

- *"This organisation would not have been anything, our heart, our core is built by our volunteers".*

"Den här organisationen hade inte varit nånting, alltså hela vårt hjärta, hela vår kärna bygger på våra volontärer".

- *"...developing plans for how to engage the volunteer groups, or rather, how we can be a part of winning campaigns and help the organisation, because, I don't know why I express myself that way, but that is our bible in a way, the priorities and in some way fulfilling our purpose in the organisation".*

"…ta fram planer kring hur vi ska engagera volontärgrupperna, eller rättare sagt, hur kan vi vara en del av att vinna kampanjer och hjälp organisationen, för det är ju, jag vet inte varför jag uttrycker mig så, men det är ju vår bibel på nåt sätt, prioriteringarna och att på nåt sätt uppfylla vårt syfte i organisationen".

- *"And then we have failed".*

"Och då har ju vi misslyckats".

- *"This is the way we are organised, that is how our logic works".*

"Det är liksom hur vi är uppbyggda, hur hela vår logik funkar".

- *"I mean, the world still needs to be saved even when we don't have a campaign, but the results don't get as concrete".*

"Jag menar, världen behöver ju alltid räddas även när vi inte har nån kampanj, men resultaten blir inte så konkreta".

- *"A lot about, like, getting a ball thrown at you from the side, and then try to do something with this ball".*

"Handlar ju väldigt mycket om att, liksom, få en boll kastad till sig från sidan, och sen försöka göra nånting av den här bollen".

- *"You often feel that you are quite inadequate, because there is always more that you can do in everything you do".*

"Man oftast känner sig rätt otillräcklig, för att det finns alltid mer man kan göra liksom i allt man gör".

- *"Because people come and go, people stop being engaged but new ones start to become engaged, so it's, it's a difficult question, I think it goes up and down".*

"För att folk kommer och går, folk slutar engagera sig men det kommer nya som engagerar sig, så det är, deet är en svår fråga, jag tror att det går upp och ner",

- *"It's usually a small number of people that run the group, who meet up regularly, and then there are other people who support us".*

"Det brukar vara en liten krets som driver gruppen, som träffas regelbundet, och sen är det en massa som stöder det hela".

- *"If we had not stood in the way, this little group, things would have been even worse".*

"Om vi inte inte satt oss till motväg här, en liten grupp, så hade det blivit ännu värre".

- *"We don't care that much if you're a member of NGO 2 or not, what matters is that you're active regarding the issue, so we'd rather collaborate with another organisation than attract people to us, so it's not a goal to convert the world to NGO 2".*

"Vi bryr oss inte om så mycket om man är medlem i NGO 2 eller inte, det som betyder är att man är engagerad i frågan, så vi vill hellre samarbeta med en annan förening än locka folk till oss, så det är inget mål att konvertera världen till NGO 2".

- *"Don't need to talk that much because it's almost obvious what you're supposed to do, it's more about if anyone wants to or has the energy for it".*

"Behöver inte prata så mycket utan det är nästan självklart vad man ska göra, det handlar mer om nån vill eller orkar göra".

- *"We are not missionaries".*

"Vi är inte missionärer".

- *"The ones who really take a closer look at NGO 2 understand that there is substantial knowledge and research, and that there are many of us who work with different environmental projects academically".*

"De som verkligen tittar på NGO 2 förstår att det finns en gedigen kunskap och forskning, och det finns många av oss som sysslar på ett akademiskt sätt med olika miljöprojekt".

- *"Linguistically, during the 20th century you never heard volunteer in this context. Now it's called volunteer and that means to do something voluntarily, so lately I've started to use that as well".*

"Språkligt, alltså på 1900-talet hörde man ju aldrig volontär i såna här sammanhang. Nu heter det ju volontär och det betyder ju frivillig, så jag har på senare år börjat använda det också".

- *"You're not just coming here and do volunteer work for us three times a week, rather, you are an activist".*

"Du kommer inte in och bara volontärar för oss tre gånger i veckan, utan, du är en aktivist".

- *"It's not like we have the energy, I mean, like what, should we climb some chimney or something like that? Maybe the media would take interest then, but otherwise it's not like we, we are more like some kind of assiduous workers in the vineyard".*

"Det är ju inte så att vi har ork, det vill ju till, jag menar, vadå, ska vi klättra upp i nån skorsten eller nåt sånt? Då kanske mediaintresset skulle flamma upp, men annars är det ju inte så att vi, utan vi är väl nån slags trägna arbetare i vingården då".