Analysing Volunteer Engagement in Biodiversity Conservation NGOs: The Case of the Irish Wildlife Trust

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Degree: MA Environment and Society Studies

Specialisation: Local Environmental Change and Sustainable Cities

Course: Master Thesis

Date: 20/05/2025

Word Count: 25974

Preface

Long before I began my studies, I have been passionate about wildlife, nature and the outdoors. As a student, I have become increasingly aware of the problems facing biodiversity, and believe that we must make every effort to preserve as much nature as possible. It therefore feels fitting that I was able to write my thesis on a topic which hopefully may be of benefit to enhancing efforts to mitigate biodiversity loss. The Irish Wildlife Trust gave me the opportunity to research volunteer engagement within the organisation, an opportunity I am most grateful for.

To all the staff and volunteers at the Irish Wildlife Trust, your time and willingness to assist this research was invaluable, and I am truly grateful for your contributions. I would like to offer special thanks to Kieran Flood, both for his supervision during my time at the Irish Wildlife Trust, and for giving me the opportunity to intern at the organisation.

I would like to thank Sietske Veenman for agreeing to correct this thesis. Her feedback allowed me clarity as to what improvements were necessary to complete this thesis to the required standard.

My family and friends also deserve thanks. Your support throughout the writing process has been crucial.

As a consequence of the assistance from everybody I have mentioned, this document contains my master's thesis. It took a lot of work, and there were some challenges along the way. However, I did not give up, and I am proud of the result.

Desmond Kenny.

Nijmegen. May 2025.

Abstract

The global degradation of the environment poses a major threat to wildlife populations and ecosystems. eNGOs working in the nature advocacy domain can play a key role in enhancing societal awareness of such issues, promoting an active citizenry and political action to mitigate biodiversity loss. Many eNGOs employ the use of volunteers to assist such endeavours, however, in an Irish context the factors contributing to individuals' engagement with such efforts remain under-researched. This thesis aims to identify the essential elements of influence to volunteer engagement, within the single case-study of the Irish Wildlife Trust.

The thesis aims to identify potential organisational practice improvements which can enhance volunteer involvement and satisfaction. To achieve this, current organisational engagement strategies, individual volunteer characteristics (identities, motivations, values), volunteer assessments of IWT engagement practices, and volunteer perceptions of IWT support and resource provision are explored in depth. This thesis used a mixed-method approach; semi-structured interviews with IWT volunteers and staff (primary method), and participant observations taken in the field (secondary method). Findings indicate that organisational practices and individual volunteer characteristics are seen as essential elements of influence to volunteer engagement. Future research may expand the scope of this research to address volunteer engagement across multiple Irish eNGOs, expanding upon the currently limited body of knowledge in this domain.

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Chapter 1: Introductory Chapter

1.1 Introduction to the Research

Human population growth and increases in per-capita consumption rates has led to the unsustainable exploitation of our planet's biological diversity, with this being exacerbated by the likes of ocean acidification, climate change, and other anthropogenic environmental impacts (Rands et al., 2010). The presence of biodiversity, or the diversity of life on planet earth, is directly related to the capability of nature to support the existence of human life, the mere sustenance of humanity relies on biodiversity (Singh et al., 2021). One of the most prominent threats to biodiversity, leading to the extinction of species is habitat loss. Cutting down forests for agricultural purposes, filling wetlands for commercial and residential sites and the associated impacts of harvesting fossil fuels are all leading causes of habitat destruction, all done for human gain (Singh et al., 2021). In an effort to combat these impacts, many governments, businesses and financial institutions are targeting the goal of net-zero emissions by 2030, and many countries are aspiring to protect a minimum of 30% of our planet's oceans and land by 2030 (Atwoli et al., 2022). Unfortunately, these targets are insufficient, being easy to set, yet difficult to achieve, and they have not yet been "matched with credible short and longer term plans to accelerate cleaner technologies and transform societies." (Atwoli et al., 2022, p. 1184). With all of this said, it is easy to despair when looking at the current state of the world. That said, among half-empty promises to protect biodiversity, and governments slow to pass effective legislation, there exists a plethora of individuals working tirelessly, often on a voluntary basis, to preserve what remains of biodiversity on earth.

This research focuses on volunteers; specifically, individuals volunteering within the Irish Wildlife Trust (IWT), an environmental nongovernmental organisation (eNGO) working to preserve and advocate for Ireland's wildlife and habitats. Volunteering, despite the limited number of individuals who actively partake in it, can be described as a phenomenon that is hugely important for the proper functioning of the society within which it occurs. The active participation in voluntary activity is considered to be a key component of a functioning civil society, generating social cohesion and contributing to societal self-regulation. Simultaneously,

volunteering can strengthen political democracy via developing individual citizenship and organising counterbalancing powers (Dekker & Hallman, 2003).

At present, there has been limited research on volunteer engagement in an Irish eNGO context. In general, the impact of various motives to volunteer remains rather hazy. Individuals may choose to volunteer for reasons that may sound self-centred, but this may have no diminishing effect on the level of commitment these individuals offer the organisation they are volunteering with. These aspects of volunteerism may be examined through conducting surveys, although to attain a deeper understanding of what drives people, and what their survey answers mean, interviews and participant observations are necessary (Dekker & Halman, 2003).

Environmental volunteering has an important role to play in civic participation. However, a major challenge remains the recruitment and retention of adequate levels of participant engagement, allowing for long-term success of volunteer supported initiatives, therefore, understanding patterns of engagement in this field is vital (Seymour & Haklay, 2017). As such, this research aims to assess the components contributing toward continuous volunteerism within the IWT.

1.2 Research Problem Statement

Understanding the factors contributing to volunteers' desires to continue working within an organisation ought to be of sizeable theoretical and practical interest to those employing volunteers. Job security and financial gain, factors contributing to those in paid employment's continuous involvement, are generally irrelevant to volunteers (Grube & Pilivian, 2000). Engagement can be described as a positive psychological state, linked with various beneficial organisational and individual outcomes, although the factors linked to volunteer engagement remain under-studied (Alfes et al., 2016). Therefore, volunteer engagement is distinct in meaning, describing the extent to which a volunteer is psychologically engaged with their work, differing from physical participation or engagement of individuals in voluntary work (Alfes et al., 2016). Many aspects of IWT outreach work, such as attendance of public engagement events, is reliant upon volunteer input and attendance, as such, understanding the reasons behind individuals desire to participate is relevant to the organisation.

Elements such as social enjoyment, individual personality characteristics, team affiliation, current life situations, types of volunteering projects and personal motivations can have an influence on an individual's initial and ongoing participation in volunteer activities (Seymour & Haklay, 2017). It is noted that future research into volunteer engagement ought to employ forms of qualitative inquiry, such as observational study and semi-structured interviews, to expand upon the contextual information associated with volunteer engagement patterns, and to understand volunteers' underlying motivations (Seymour & Haklay, 2017). The researcher has identified one single study conducted on the topic of the motivations of Irish volunteers, involving only individuals volunteering in social and healthcare (MacNeela, 2008). It was noted that further research is necessary to explore other forms of volunteering, both within health and social care, and outside of it. That said, the study did identify certain commonalities within the participants studied, such as volunteers being more goal oriented, rather than motivated by financial gain, while lifestyle issues, personal traits such as career, family and age, and volunteer roles shaping each individual's experience (MacNeela, 2008).

This thesis contributes to an underdeveloped topic of study in the Irish context, dealing with volunteers working in a sector completely separate to that of health and social care. Consequently, the current body of research available is not sufficiently developed enough for an eNGO wishing to improve its volunteer engagement strategies based upon feedback or data collected from volunteers, as to their identities, motivations and values contributing to their desire to work in biodiversity conservation. Hence, eNGOs are ill equipped in their ability to develop and enhance the ways in which they operate in such a way that they can align their activities with the various individual influences which contribute toward their volunteers continuous efforts.

The activity of volunteering is primarily performed within structures of host organisations. Volunteers often work in the same organisation, in frequently unchanging roles, with largely the same core group of volunteers, over the course of several years. For many volunteers, their voluntary activities are comparable to careers, with individuals coming to identify with the goals of the organisation, and committed to their values (Grube & Pilivian, 2000). It is necessary to

note that the behaviour of every individual occurs within situational contexts, the characteristics of each situational context must be considered while examining volunteer behaviour (Grube & Pilivian, 2000). This research intends to contribute toward expanding the body of knowledge on Irish volunteers within the eNGO domain. Irish wildlife and biodiversity faces numerous threats to its survival, necessitating the work of eNGOs such as the IWT to preserve and protect it. Many public outreach efforts of the IWT are heavily supported by volunteers, therefore the ability of the IWT to allow for sustained positive contributions from volunteers requires understanding the factors impacting their engagement.

1.3 Research Aim and Research Questions

1.3.1 Research Aim

This thesis seeks to explore and evaluate the assorted influences which shape volunteer engagement at the IWT. To achieve this, it aims to examine factors such as organisational strategies, the characteristics of volunteers (identities, motivations and values), and the contextual influences occurring within the lived experiences of volunteers at the IWT. The desired outcome of this research is to create applicable recommendations to improve engagement processes within the organisation.

1.3.2 Research Questions

Leading on from the research aim, the primary research question this study intends to answer is:

"What are the essential elements which influence volunteer engagement at the Irish Wildlife Trust, and what may be improved in terms of organisational practices, to enhance volunteer involvement and satisfaction?"

To adequately answer the primary research question, the answers to the following sub-questions are necessary:

1. From an IWT staff perspective, to what extent do the current engagement strategies of the organisation, such as recruitment, support systems and community outreach, influence volunteer involvement?

2. What determining factors, including individual characteristics such as identities, motivations and values, do IWT volunteers view as significant to their engagement with the organisation?
3. How do IWT volunteers assess the current engagement practices of the organisation, and what improvements to enhance their involvement, satisfaction and ability to contribute to the organisation do they suggest?
4. How are the supports and resources provided by the IWT perceived by their volunteers, and to what extent do these mechanisms influence their overall engagement and effectiveness within the organisation?

1.4 Societal and Scientific Relevance

At time of writing, there exists a research gap regarding the exploration of self-identified volunteer motivations, and the link of such motivations to overt conservation outcomes and behaviours (Larson et al., 2020). Understanding and identifying unique individual characteristics (identities, motivations and values) of citizens' participation in voluntary roles in the Irish biodiversity conservation sector will contribute to closing this gap. The IWT, as a well-established and renowned eNGO in Ireland, is a relevant case study, as volunteer supported initiatives have contributed to the organisation's efforts to engage the public with conservation related issues. Due to how citizens' voluntary efforts have been proven to substantially contribute toward our awareness of the presence and distribution of biodiversity, simultaneously increasing recognition of issues related to conservation, understanding the influence of motivations on volunteer activity could contribute toward achieving conservation policy objectives (Asah & Blahna, 2012).

Previous research has shown that while volunteers may be motivated to act, they are not always certain their actions will create tangible, pro-environmental impacts (Liarakou et al., 2011). For the study of volunteer engagement in biodiversity conservation, the IWT provides a rich setting for research, it being one of Ireland's oldest (formed 1979), and largest environmental NGOs. Adding to the knowledge base of engaging individuals with continuous conservation volunteering, the IWT has for decades played a prominent role in advocacy for Irish biodiversity and public engagement with conservation, making it a highly relevant setting within which to

examine the factors influencing volunteer involvement. The IWT is a member of the Irish Environmental Network (IEN), a collaborative network of eNGOs in Ireland, and is one of Ireland's most well-known eNGOs, with long-term experience in volunteer-assisted initiatives, ensuring that although this research focuses on the IWT, it may be beneficial to other eNGOs. This research aims to uncover, firstly, the current ways the IWT engages with its volunteers. It will then examine exactly why individuals choose to offer their time on a non-obligatory, non-financially incentivised basis to an eNGO. The findings will contribute to the body of knowledge on volunteer engagement for biodiversity conservation, providing clear, actionable steps for the IWT as to how they may better engage with their volunteers.

1.5 Limitations of the Research

This section delineates the limitations of this research. Limitations are aspects or occurrences that arise throughout a study which limit the extent of the research, potentially impacting the conclusion or end results that may be acquired (Simon & Goes, 2013). The first limitation is the scope of the project, scope being described as the domain of the research, or parameters within which the study occurs, with the problem the research intends to address fitting within such parameters (Simon & Goes, 2013). The scope of this research is within the parameters of a single eNGO, the IWT, a limitation being the number of staff and volunteers from which the researcher could collect data.

As this research used qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews, their limitations are now discussed. Limitations of semi-structured interviews include their focus on meaning and experience rather than contextual sensitivities, findings often being un-generalisable due to small sample size, their time-consuming nature and complicated processes of analysis and interpretation (Taherdoost, 2022). Although the intention was not necessarily generalisability, this must be mentioned nonetheless. Another limitation relates to the fact that the research employed a single case study design, and such designs have been frequently criticised for not being generalisable (Gomm et al., 2000).

1.6 Structure of the Research

Chapter 1 has provided the launch-pad from which the rest of this work will proceed, introducing the research intentions, and why it is necessary. Chapter 2 is the literature review and theoretical framework. The literature review informs the reader of the most conceptually important topics to address the research questions, including volunteerism, individual characteristics of volunteers, recruitment, retention, management and public engagement for conservation. Following this, the theoretical framework explains the most important theoretical concepts underpinning the study. In Chapter 3, the methodology chapter, the philosophy of the research, sampling and case selection, research methods, data collection and data analysis are outlined. Chapter 4 discusses the findings from the data gathered from 9 semi-structured interviews and participant observations. Chapter 5 concludes this research, answers the research questions, provides recommendations for future research, while reflecting on the process.

Chapter 2: Literature Review & Theoretical Framework

2.1 Literature Review

2.1.1 Introduction

In order to answer the primary research question, "*What are the essential elements which influence volunteer engagement at the Irish Wildlife Trust, and what may be improved in terms of organisational practices, to enhance volunteer involvement and satisfaction?*" this chapter analyses key literature necessary to understand the broad spectrum of volunteerism. The chapter begins with an introduction to volunteerism, followed by discussing individual volunteer characteristics (identities, motivations, values), recruitment, retention and management, and public engagement for conservation.

2.1.2 Volunteerism, Volunteering for Nature and Irish Volunteerism

Conceptually, volunteerism has been widely studied, with various theoretical approaches applied to its research. Psychological approaches focus on internal motivators, such as self-concept and personality traits, while sociological theorisations examine characteristics such as gender, race and social class. Economic approaches view volunteerism as a form of unpaid labour, nonetheless driven by expectations of personal benefit (Wilson, 2012). Early definitions reflect such understandings, with volunteers viewed as individuals anticipating psychological benefits as a consequence of volunteering, rather than material gain (Smith, 1981). Volunteerism, more recently, can be viewed as a global social capital distribution mechanism, across welfare, human services and health domains (Liu et al., 2017). Effective volunteer programs necessitate alignment between individual audiences and outlined social objectives. A helpful lens through which to view this alignment is social exchange theory (SET), which posits that the sum of volunteer interactions contains an exchange between altruistic effort and egoistic reward (Phillips, 1982). In the absence of financial remuneration, volunteers may still attain both psychological and personal benefits resulting from their engagement (to be discussed further in later sections).

Volunteerism is diverse in form and function, with volunteers offering time and effort on an ongoing basis to support broad ranging communities and individuals. Some volunteer initiatives are reactive, aiming to offer immediate support or relief, while others, by addressing systemic issues, aim to generate structural change (Snyder & Omoto, 2008). The definition of volunteerism most applicable to this research describes it as, "freely chosen and deliberate helping activities that extend over time, are engaged in without expectation of reward or other compensation and often through formal organizations." (Snyder & Omoto, 2008, p. 3). This definition differentiated volunteerism from other forms of helping, emphasising its recurrent nature, occurrence within organisational settings, and absence of specific individual gain. Other conceptualisations of volunteerism also view it as sustained, organised, prosocial behaviour taking place within an organisational setting, for the benefit of others (Penner, 2002). According to Penner (2002), four core features which characterise volunteerism are longevity, intentionality, non-obligatory nature and organisational setting. These features offer a foundation for analysis of volunteer engagement and related practices within an eNGO context.

Volunteerism occupies an increasingly important and specific role within the realm of nature conservation. For instance, contributions by volunteers to biodiversity focussed citizen-science initiatives, such as individuals supporting the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF), are both personally fulfilling and scientifically important (Ganzevoort et al., 2017). Volunteer motivations within this domain are diverse, with certain individuals attracted by a desire to assist conservation science, and others to management efforts (Ganzevoort et al., 2017). Unlike volunteering in social domains, a unique element of volunteering for nature is the existence of a sense of relatedness to nonhuman others, such as ecosystems or wildlife, largely absent in social domains (Ganzevoort & van den Born, 2025). Continuous involvement of environmental volunteers may thus rely on a sense of meaningfulness derived from their involvement. Volunteers frequently cite a desire to continue their involvement, in contexts where their participation feels fulfilling, useful, and with capacity to produce tangible results (Ganzevoort & van den Born, 2025). Consequently, recognition of the diversity among nature volunteers across contexts, values and tasks, may assist organisations in tailoring support systems, appreciation and communication practices which further enhance engagement (Ganzevoort & van den Born, 2020). Brudney & Meijs (2009) argue that the nexus of volunteer involvement ought to account

for the broad array of stakeholders, embracing the wider community within which an organisation operates. Such insights may be useful in contextualising environmental volunteers experiences in specific national contexts, such as this research site, Ireland.

Historically in the Irish context, volunteerism functioned as both a politically important and community-driven activity. Individual motivations and sociodemographic characteristics remain influential, although interpersonal social networks among volunteers significantly contribute to pro-environmental behaviour (Brennan, 2007). Thus, volunteer administrators are encouraged to examine local conditions, to better comprehend how such factors influence engagement. In particular, social interactions may improve awareness of community needs, strengthening local social-networks (Brennan, 2005). In recent years, Irish volunteerism has witnessed a shift toward increasingly structured forms of engagement, with deeper focus on meeting organisational needs, rather than community specific efforts (Nevillle, 2016). This shift indicates a departure from earlier Irish volunteering models, which primarily sought to compensate for state limitations in service provision domains. Consequently, it is argued that an erosion of the practical ethos of volunteering in Ireland may be occurring over time (Neville, 2016). Academic research on volunteerism in the Irish context remains relatively limited (MacNeela, 2008), and the voluntary sector is marked by fragmented values and objectives, weakening a sense of collective identity within the sector (Somers & Bradford, 2006). The relationship between the voluntary sector and the Irish state was historically characterised by the principle of subsidiarity, with the voluntary sector frequently using state funding to deliver social services (Donnelly-Cox et al., 2001). Such structural dynamics offer context for further consideration of contemporary challenges facing volunteer involved eNGOs in Ireland.

2.1.3 Volunteer Identities

Research into volunteer role identity has found that individuals attain multiple social role identities, emerging as a consequence of others expectations and social interactions. Such role identities, over time, may become central to an individual's self-conceptualisation (Grönlund, 2011). The sense an individual has of themself may be defined as their identity, this being the combination of their values, abilities, background, roles and reference groups of importance to the individual (Grönlund, 2011). Identities may focus on the past, what was once true of an

individual; the present, what is currently true about a person; or the future, the person an individual wishes or expects to become, feels obligated to attempt to become, or even fears to become (Oyserman et al., 2012). Within the identity literature, role identity emerges as a key area of study; "*Role identities* reflect membership in particular roles (e.g., student, parent, professional) that require another person to play a complementary role." (Oyserman et al., 2012, p. 74). Understanding these role identities is crucial, as they may influence a volunteer's engagement, and provide clarity to the IWT as to what organisational practices are necessary to improve satisfaction and involvement. In the context of this research, role identities are most relevant, as this thesis seeks to delve into the dynamics between volunteers and the organisational framework of the IWT, examining the individual characteristics which influence volunteers' decisions to participate, as this will be significant for identifying elements which influence volunteer engagement at the organisation. While previous studies have examined volunteer identities, there have been few studies within the specific context of Irish eNGO volunteers, highlighting the need for this study.

This section addresses two theories related to identity, Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Role Identity Theory (RIT). Social identity is conceptually defined as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1974, p. 69). SIT mainly seeks to explain how people come to adopt and behave in terms of social identities, rather than personal ones, focussing on how the presence of a social identity impacts the behaviours and perceptions of individuals, simultaneously examining how this influences social relations between groups and individuals (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). Essentially, SIT posits that individual identities are influenced by their group belonging, which in this context, could mean the formation of a volunteer identity through group membership. SIT is a broad theoretical framework. Through its addressing of interpersonal and intergroup behaviours, intrapersonal cognitive mechanisms and social mechanisms, it can assist our understanding of a broad range of phenomena (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). In a qualitative study of social identity dynamics within a volunteer group, Bowe et al., (2020) found that aspects of community belonging, such as receiving and subsequently reciprocating assistance from others may motivate volunteering. Community identification was found to emerge among volunteers over the course of their

continuous volunteering over time, sustaining individuals' commitment to voluntary roles (Bowe et al., 2020). As such, emerging from the SIT literature is the importance of community belonging, in encouraging sustained volunteer commitment. For the IWT, leaning into the strengths of SIT, such as deepening a sense of community among volunteers, could contribute to sustained commitment, indicating that organisational practices which enhance a sense of collective identity within the volunteer base may positively influence volunteer satisfaction and involvement.

Moving away from SIT, a more individualised theory, Identity Theory (IT), is now addressed. Aside from group involvement, an individual's identity may be "composed of the meanings that persons attach to the multiple roles they typically play in highly differentiated contemporary societies." (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 284). No two volunteers have identical perceptions of whichever role within an organisation they fulfill, thus each individual's meaning attached to their role varies. This is crucial for the IWT to note, as volunteer's engagement may change as a consequence of role expectations and lived social experiences. Identity theorists posit that the greater the weight of an identity relative to other identities incorporated into an individual's self-conceptualisation, the higher the likelihood of behaviour choices in accordance with expectations associated with said identity (Stryker & Burke, 2000). As such, for the IWT to enhance volunteer involvement and satisfaction, understanding what makes the act of volunteering central to one's individual identity is crucial. IT is thus a useful lens through which to view volunteer behaviour and role expectations, simultaneously useful in clarifying that simply volunteering cannot make up an individual's entire identity.

In terms of differences between SIT and IT, the base from which identities emerge is key. For Social Identity Theory, categories and groups, while for Identity Theory, roles (Stets & Burke, 2000). However, within both theories the self is reflected upon, individuals categorising, specifying and identifying themselves within broader social realities (Stets & Burke, 2000). In Identity Theory, identities are seen as internalised expectations of a role, the expectation an individual has of a position, within a relationship network being their social role (Stryker & Burke, 2000). In contrast, in SIT, the main idea is that the social category into which an individual falls and feels they belong, offers the individual the capacity to categorise themselves

in terms of group-membership (Hogg et al., 1995). IT is focussed on the process of labelling oneself within a specific social category, accounting for the parts others play in assisting this categorisation, and linking conceptions of self to the fulfilling of behaviours expected by certain role fulfillments (Hogg et al., 1995). “Social identity theory, in contrast, has a somewhat more dynamic and more highly elaborated perspective, which explains contextual salience in terms of social comparative factors, self-esteem, motivation, uncertainty reduction, and social explanation.” (Hogg et al., 1995, p. 263). To conclude on identities, both SIT and IT offer insights into the process of volunteer engagement within the IWT in a complementary manner. Individuals' personal role expectations can influence their behaviour, as illustrated by IT. Meanwhile, the influence of group dynamics and social contexts is best examined through SIT. Due to the multifaceted nature of volunteer engagement, acknowledging the simultaneously present internal and external factors is vital to understanding it, and can assist in informing organisational practices for the IWT, enhancing participation and commitment.

Regarding the primary research question on the essential elements of influence within the process of volunteer engagement, understanding volunteer identities is crucial. Identities offer insights into the pre-conditions for involvement, individual role-expectations and sustained commitment. Insights acquired from SIT and IT indicate that organisational practices which foster a feeling of identity among volunteers, such as feeling part of a community, and having defined roles may contribute to volunteer satisfaction and involvement.

2.1.4 Volunteer Motivations

Understanding the underlying motivations contributing to individuals' desire to partake in voluntary work is vital for enhancing volunteer engagement. Ryan and Deci (2000), say that “To be motivated means *to be moved* to do something.” (p. 54). Someone who feels no need or desire to act may thus be seen as unmotivated, whereas an individual who is activated or energised towards a goal is motivated (Ryan & Dec, 2000). Those motivated to volunteer at the IWT being the locus of this study, understanding the motivations present within the volunteer base of the organisation is key to answering the primary research question, and sub-question 2 & 3 of this thesis. This section analyses key theoretical perspectives on motivation, using a critical analysis

and empirical insights from the motivation literature to explain the applicability of utilising volunteer motivations to enhance volunteer engagement within the IWT.

A key theory regarding motivation underpinning this section is that of Self-Determination Theory (SDT). SDT is a broad framework, useful for understanding why people do what they do, and what leads to either improvements or deteriorations within a person's life (Ryan & Vansteenkite, 2023). Individualism is a defining feature of the human psyche, made up of both agency and self-consciousness. As humans may review their own actions, and assess alternative pathways of action, they can self-regulate their actions, thus their experiences (Ryan & Vansteenkite, 2023). Simultaneously, as social creatures, humans may be controlled and influenced by external forces, causing lived-experiences to manifest which are not solely influenced by self-regulated forces (Ryan & Vansteenkiste, 2023). SDT is useful for understanding the processes within engagement, its focus being, "the investigation of people's inherent growth tendencies and innate psychological needs that are the basis for their self-motivation and personality integration, as well as for the conditions that foster those positive processes." (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 68). SDT has identified several categories of motivation, each having varying impacts on performance, mainly well-being, personal experience and learning (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The two types of motivation to be discussed within this section are intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic motivation may be defined as "the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one's capacities, to explore, and to learn." (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 70). Essentially, intrinsic motivation comes from within the individual, the desire to act not in pursuit of external rewards, rather emerging from personal desire to act in accordance with one's self-regulated forces. Further definitions of intrinsic motivation explain it as "the innate, natural propensity to engage in one's interests and exercise one's capabilities, and in doing so, to seek and conquer optimal challenges." (Deci & Ryan, 1985, p. 43). The ability of the activity of volunteering to meet an individual's internal desire to act, learn and express themselves through tangible activities in line with their interests is a useful way to conceptualise intrinsic motivation within this research context. Whether supports and resources are key to maintaining intrinsic

motivation, as relevant to sub-question 4, it is interesting to posit whether intrinsic motivation in and of itself is enough to allow for continuous engagement within a volunteering context.

Within the study of motivation, the underlying attitudes and goals that lead to action is termed as the orientation of motivation, which concerns the 'why' of actions (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Whereas intrinsic motivation comes from an individual's internal drives, extrinsic motivation "refers to doing something because it leads to a separable outcome." (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 55). In other words, individuals are extrinsically motivated to act when the orientation of their motivation comes from a desire to attain something from said action. Although other perspectives on extrinsic motivation view it as an entirely non-autonomous behaviour driver, SDT posits that it varies greatly in its degree of autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). As such, varying categories under the umbrella of extrinsic motivation have been categorised. Introjected regulation outlines an internal regulation where individuals act due to feeling pressure, to avoid anxiety and guilt, or to attain a sense of pride (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Regulation through identification outlines an individual's capacity to identify with the personal importance of a behaviour, thus the individual accepts this behaviour as their own (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Finally, integrated regulation, the most self-autonomous extrinsic motivation, is the process by which the individual, through self-examination and bringing new regulations into congruence with their needs and values, the things they must do become assimilated to the self (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The defining features of volunteering being that it is voluntary, sustained, and ongoing helping, indicate that it could be useful to employ a motivational perspective to learn about the motivations which may dispose individuals to seek opportunities to volunteer, commit themselves to volunteering, and sustain voluntary efforts over time (Clary et al., 1998). The Volunteer Function Inventory (VFI), as proposed by Clary et al., (1998) identified six distinct yet interconnected motivational influences within decisions to volunteer. First, values, focusses on opportunities provided through volunteering for individuals to express values aligned with their altruistic views toward others (Clary et al, 1998). Second, understanding, posits that volunteering offers opportunities for individuals to learn new skills, and exercise their abilities and knowledge which may otherwise remain unpracticed (Clary et al., 1998). The third motivational function of volunteering is social, concerning relationships with others, volunteering being an opportunity to

engage with others, and partake in activities viewed as important by others (Clary et al., 1998). There are also career motivations to volunteer, with potential benefits to one's professional life associated with volunteering (Clary et al., 1998). Volunteerism may also be motivated by what Clary et al., (1998) call the protective function; “such motivations center on protecting the ego from negative features of the self and, in the case of volunteerism, may serve to reduce guilt over being more fortunate than others and to address one's personal problems.” (p. 1518). Finally, in contrast to the protective function, there is enhancement, a motivational function which focuses on growth and development of the ego, and individual striving to fulfill this through volunteering (Clary et al., 1998).

For the IWT to enhance their volunteer engagement strategies, gaining insight into the underlying motivational influences of their volunteers could be beneficial for enhancing organisational practices related to volunteerism. SDT, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and the VIF framework provide theoretical insight into motivation, with VIF specifically focussed on volunteers. Utilising these conceptualisations of motivation allow this research to address the central research question on the essential elements which influence volunteer engagement.

2.1.5 Volunteer Values

Individual values (personal values) can be described as broad desirable goals which motivate individuals to act, and are guiding principles in people’s lives, affecting their behaviour and preferences across situations and over time (Sagiv et al., 2017). Values, as such, can make up part of what an individual perceives as their identity, and contribute towards decisions to act in line with their values. For the IWT, understanding the role of values, as a contributing factor to their volunteers identity-creation, which in turn influences their motivation, is important in order to effectively enhance their volunteer engagement strategies. A widely held belief about values is that human sociality and attitudes are influenced by what individuals consider important in their lives (Boer & Fischer, 2013). Although values may be expressed by a motivation to volunteer, they are more general than motivations, and can be viewed more as guidelines in humans’ lives, with individuals’ behaviours influenced not only by self-interests or passions, simultaneously by their belief systems, norms and values (Dekker & Halmann, 2003). Values are key to this research, as they can contribute to individual volunteers’ perceptions of self, identity, and that

they may contribute to their desire to volunteer. Understanding values in the context of volunteering at an eNGO is thus necessary to answering the research questions.

Values are distinct from, yet play into the creation of individuals identities and maintenance of motivations. Personal values directly influence motivation, being general beliefs that one should act in a certain manner (Parks & Guay, 2009). Parks and Guay (2009) define personal values as "learned beliefs that serve as guiding principles about how individuals ought to behave." (p. 676). It has been concluded by some organisational scholars that, due to strong organisational cultures encouraging normative behaviours, individual values are not relevant to behaviour. However, culture is a complex phenomenon to manage, and even though people may adjust their behaviour, to an extent, from external cues, these cues may not influence underlying motivations or goals they pursue. As such, understanding how values influence motivation may be beneficial to organisations aiming to increase commitment to goals, and aligning such goals with individual values may yield improved performance (Parks & Guay, 2009). The influence of values on motivation is thus a potentially useful domain the IWT should seek to understand about their volunteers. Understanding volunteer values is necessary to answer sub-question 3 of this research, as value alignment could potentially enhance volunteer involvement and satisfaction. Values are also relevant for the primary research question on the essential elements influencing volunteer engagement, and sub-question 2 about individual characteristics of volunteers.

2.1.6 Volunteer Recruitment and Retention and Management

While the motivation to volunteer may be seen as the individual question, the organisational question can be seen as the recruitment of volunteers (Hager & Brundey, 2011). Material resources, such as salaries or financial remuneration, as offered by for-profit organisations, are not an option for charitable organisations seeking to recruit volunteers, lying outside of the financial and ideological circumstances within which such organisations operate (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2008). As such, other methods must be employed by organisations seeking to recruit volunteers, with expressing the non-material benefits of volunteering potentially a useful avenue for such organisations to explore. SIT is argued to be highly relevant to volunteer recruitment, focusessing on the attainment of non-material outcomes, such as acquiring self-worth and as a motivator of group involvement (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2008). For volunteer recruitment to be

successful, the first step involves consideration of the groups from which the recruitment is taking place, as by doing so may identify the various potential motivations of possible volunteers (Clary et al., 1992). Following this, tailoring persuasive messaging which plays into the identified motivations of potential volunteers is noted as key in successful volunteer recruitment (Clary et al., 1992). Formal volunteering, such as volunteering within a charitable organisation, is the predominant form of voluntary activity discussed in the literature. However, a large amount of informal helping takes place, and disregarding voluntary activities occurring outside of organisational contexts may lead to a gap in sufficient conceptualisations of volunteering, and non-profit organisations could potentially seek individuals already involved in informal helping as a group highly suited to recruitment (Lee & Brundey, 2012). Aside from recruiting individuals viewed as poised to help, organisations can attract volunteers to assist via inducing anticipated respect among non-volunteers, through showing them that the organisations cares for and respects their volunteers (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2008). In fact, organisations ought to ensure that support provided to volunteers is mentioned in the recruitment phase, as such efforts are seen as more impactful in successful recruitment than focussing on organisational success, or the promotion of potential social ties with other volunteers (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2008). As such, proficient volunteer recruitment is seen to rely on the identification of potential target groups, ensuring effective messaging to these cohorts, simultaneously highlighting organisational support provision and respect for current volunteers. However, recruitment is only the first step of volunteer engagement. Once onboarded, sustaining volunteer engagement within an organisation hinges on their ability to retain individuals as active volunteers.

Non-profit organisations frequently rely on volunteers, and as such, a priority for these organisations is volunteer retention. Even so, volunteers can be at the periphery of communication, often so in cases where opportunities for feedback are sought after (Garner & Garner, 2011). Relationships between nonprofits and their volunteers are generally of mutual benefit, although if something negative occurs, volunteers may be less invested than paid staff in addressing such issues, and may simply leave the organisation (Garner & Garner, 2011). Avoiding such issues in order to retain volunteers is a key issue for organisations in their endeavours to retain volunteers. Retention may be defined as the successful maintenance of volunteer involvement (Jamison, 2003). In order to maintain retention, two forms of volunteer

turnover must be mitigated. Involuntary turnover may occur as a consequence of illness, retirement, death or dismissal. Meanwhile, voluntary turnover is a consequence of factors beyond the organisation's control, such as a volunteer's relocation causing an individual to leave the organisation (Jamison, 2003). Organisational support, job-characteristics viewed as positive such as varied tasks, opportunities within the organisation to develop social networks and volunteer training are all viewed as positively reinforcing volunteer retention (Newton et al., 2014). Volunteer coordinators, by highlighting successful outcomes resulting from volunteer efforts, can induce a sense of pride among volunteers, assuring awareness among them of the importance of their work to the organisation, thus enhancing engagement (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2007). Essentially, organisational provision of a supportive environment, fostering of social connections among volunteers, and capacity for the provision of structured, impactful roles all reinforce volunteer retention. For the IWT, the sustained involvement and engagement of their volunteers are directly influenced by such organisational practices discussed in this section.

Organisations utilising volunteers have begun to notice that issues facing staff, such as training and work conditions, simultaneously apply to volunteers offering major time commitments and playing important roles. Historically, considerations of volunteers' personal benefit attainment resulting from their assistance was minimal. Nowadays, if volunteers are expected to dedicate their time in a dependable manner, organisations must consider the importance of personal benefits resulting from their unpaid workforces endeavours (Grossman & Furano, 1999). Three key areas have been identified as crucial to the successful operation of volunteer programs; screening, training and ongoing management and support. Screening pertains to the organisational selection of individuals likely to become effective volunteers. Training denotes the equipment of onboarded volunteers with the necessary skills to act effectively. Ongoing management and support is vital to ensure volunteer time is well spent, skills are improved and volunteers are effectively used (Grossman & Furano, 1999). Due to the extent that non-profit organisations rely on volunteer input, it is argued that the implementation of a service delivery system which effectively utilises the abilities and skills of volunteers and assists in creating a volunteer work experience which motivates the volunteer and maintains their engagement is a vital task for NPOs' volunteer management efforts (Wisner et al., 2005). Key aspects of

volunteer management found to maintain engagement at NPOs' include orientation and training, which in conjunction with knowledge and skills acquired in this process, are clear opportunities for socialisation among volunteers (Wisner et al., 2005). Volunteer managers must offer opportunities which ensure efficient volunteer time use, reducing volunteer constraints while enhancing organisational benefits, by offering relevant learning, networking and social opportunities (Gage & Thapa, 2012). Following this, reflection allows volunteers to see what good they are accomplishing via their involvement, and how their role assists organisational goal achievement (Wisner et al., 2005). Social interaction, both with paid-staff and other volunteers, through its fulfillment of volunteer social needs, and the opportunity to make volunteers feel increasingly involved with the organisation by interacting with staff is another effective management practice, enhancing engagement (Wisner et al., 2005).

2.1.7 Public Engagement for Conservation: Participation, Challenges, Awareness and Approaches to Participation

In a world of constant entertainment availability and profuse information bombardment, the conservation community frequently fails to reach the public and influence behaviour (Wright et al., 2015). As such, public engagement has emerged as an increasingly prominent strategy in conservation domains, moving from traditionally top-down communication methods toward inclusive, participatory approaches. Previously, disseminating information to raise awareness was central in efforts to alter behaviour for benefitting conservation (Kidd et al., 2019). Nevertheless, broader benefits may result from participatory approaches which foster appreciation, trust and shared learning among diverse perspectives, especially relevant to environmental governance outcomes (de Vente et al., 2016). Participants attain opportunities to reconsider the assumptions underpinning their positions by encountering alternative perspectives, allowing increasingly reflective and informed decision-making. Participation is most effective when integrated consistently and early in decision making contexts, in conjunction with skilled mediation and clear objectives (Reed, 2008). Public participation is understood as citizen involvement in policy formation and agenda setting (Rowe & Frewer, 2004), which happens actively via mutual engagement, or passively through consultation (Reed et al., 2018). Within this study, volunteers at the IWT are stakeholders; their roles within organisational decision making processes offer insight into engagement dynamics in an eNGO context.

There remain prominent barriers to achieving effective public engagement in conservation, despite its benefits. Conflicts frequently emerge in protected areas, between local stakeholders and public agencies, the likelihood of which increases in the absence of participatory management. NGOs may act as intermediaries in such conflicts, mediating between actors and bridging information gaps, hence contributing to conservation success (Nita et al., 2018). Recognition of NGO conflict addressing capacity indicates a necessity to further comprehend how NGOs enhance meaningful engagement. Indeed, a crucial role is played by emotional framing in public outreach, research suggesting that optimistically framed messaging is most effective in motivating collective action. Optimistic narratives enhance collaboration and hope, counteracting the culture of environmental despair (McAfee et al., 2019). In contrast to actions like energy saving with immediate personal benefits resulting from pro-environmental behaviour, conservation lacks similar short-term benefits, potentially impacting motivation (Kidd et al., 2019). Campaigns which successfully promote conservation behaviours frequently include effective engagement strategies, leadership, resourcing and knowledge exchange (Day, 2019). As biodiversity loss involves interconnected scientific, political and social concerns, solutions are necessarily trans-disciplinary, involving continuous engagement between stakeholders (Jolibert & Wesselink, 2012). Thus, communication is vital in efforts to overcome barriers to engagement and increase understanding among diverse groups.

Improving citizen awareness of conservation involves integrating and acknowledging the histories, values and relationships people attach to landscapes. Differing perceptions of nature do not necessarily arise from ignorance, rather emerging from complex ecological and social characteristics of places, and the psychological meanings attached (Byg et al., 2017). For conservation to maintain sustainability, it requires active involvement of local communities, their perceptions and concerns integrated into implementation and planning. Such inclusion improves communication, supports conflict resolution and enhances clarity in managing trade-offs (Byg et al., 2017). Citizen-science as an example of participatory engagement, is a strong example of connections between the public and scientific enquiry, highlighting the shift and transformation between science and society (Varumo et al., 2020). McAfee et al., (2021) note how community involvement in environmental decision making leads to sustained commitment, when framed as

a legacy opportunity. They outline three pillars for effective conservation outreach: consistent stakeholder collaboration, inclusive co-designing solutions and strategic use of collective memory to enhance responsibility and connection. Other research noted how flagship species may be useful in garnering public support, while conveying the importance of less charismatic species to ecosystem function is not to be disregarded (Liordos et al., 2017).

Participatory approaches have unique advantages for producing increasingly legitimate outcomes, simultaneously enhancing deeper engagement. Quantitative studies effectively outline general trends, yet qualitative approaches are more applicable for understanding nuanced participation dynamics (Gaventa & Barrett, 2012). Citizenship theories outline the importance of an engaged, knowledgeable public which exercises their democratic rights, simultaneously holding government bodies accountable. (Gaventa & Barrett, 2012). If maintained, active engagement enhances networks and skills, sustaining continuous civic action. In parallel, participatory approaches promote more legitimate, accurate problem-framing, specifically when wider ranging perspectives are brought into dialogue (Huttunen et al., 2022). Participation requires bilateral communication and citizens not merely responding to, but shaping policy and research agendas.

Excluding stakeholders comes with noteworthy risks. Projects designed without stakeholder contributions frequently impose rigid timelines and objectives which alienate communities, erode trust and limit the potential of meaningful collaboration (Turner, 2015). With the advancements of communication technologies, participation has itself changed. Digital platforms currently enable broader, more flexible interaction styles, reducing distance and time constraints (Eimhjellen et al., 2018). Such tools offer new avenues for engagement, allowing NGOs such as the IWT to expand outreach, adapt engagement strategies to modern social landscapes, and strengthen community ties.

2.1.8 Conclusion

This literature review sought to practically outline key background and contextually important literature relevant to this research. It covered multiple important areas of research relevant to volunteer engagement, offering context as to the domain of this research. Following this, the

theoretical framework builds upon the context provided, explaining to the reader the theoretical lens through which the findings shall be interpreted.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Introduction

The literature review sought to comprehensively introduce previously addressed research relevant to understanding current trends in volunteer engagement within eNGOs. Building upon this, the theoretical framework further elaborates on the previous section, further addressing the key concepts necessary to guide the analysis of this research.

2.2.2 Volunteerism and Prosocial Behaviour

The first theory this framework examines is volunteerism and prosocial behaviour, with volunteering defined by Pilivian and Siegl, "as a nonobligatory role identity." (2007, p. 452). Psychological factors exist within the minds of volunteers, one factor being eudaimonic well-being, "defined in terms of meaning and self-realization. This involves not only feeling good, but also feeling good about oneself." (Piliavin & Siegl, 2007, p. 452). Mannino et al., propose that volunteerism "is a motivated phenomenon, propelled by motivational forces that lead individuals to seek out volunteer activities and to surmount barriers that impede their participation as well as their sustained involvement." (2011, p. 129).

Three major challenges exist within the development of a theory of volunteering. First, the phenomenon of volunteering is complex, unclearly delineated, spanning a wide variety of organisations, sectors and actions (Hustinx et al., 2010). Second, volunteering is a relevant topic across multiple disciplines, from sociology and economics, to social work and management science. Consequently, minimal consensus on which theoretical perspectives are most suited to studying volunteering exists across disciplines (Hustinx et al., 2010). Finally, "Present theories predominantly focus on uncovering the "laws of volunteering", that is, to explain the occurrence or non-occurrence of the phenomenon." (Hustinx et al., 2010, p. 411). Wilson and Musick's theory of volunteerism is based on the following premises. First, volunteer work is a productive activity, similar to other forms of work, not a leisure pursuit nor act of consumption (Wilson &

Musick, 1997). Secondly, to varying degrees, volunteer work involves collective action, with much volunteer work happening on behalf of a collective good (Wilson & Musick, 1997). Finally, volunteers' relationships with the recipient of their labour is an ethical one, where volunteers give their time to others (Wilson & Musick, 1997). Other explanations of volunteerism note that decisions to volunteer simply reflect one's personality type, some individuals more naturally predisposed toward volunteering than others (Dekker & Halman, 2003).

There are three essential characteristics of volunteer work to be accounted for in research. First, voluntariness, the fact that volunteering is independent, autonomous and free. Following this, research must consider its non-profit status, voluntary work is part of a not-for-profit system which holds societal value. Finally, volunteering is a meaningful activity (Güntert et al., 2022). When examining the individuals partaking in volunteering in a European context, differences in who volunteers are become evident. Specifically, differences in gender distribution, age groups, urban and rural populations, occupational and employment status, and level of income all exist (Güntert et al., 2022).

In examining the economic cost of volunteering, opportunity cost must be considered. Opportunity cost is as the compensation or wage an individual gives up in order to volunteer. According to economic theories of volunteerism, voluntary work incurs more than simply explicit costs, such as childcare and transport, including opportunities to earn, individuals may give up to volunteer (Govekar & Govekar, 2002). The essence of volunteerism is essentially work that creates social output, not done for financial reimbursement, and without the presence of volunteers willing to do it, would incur paid resources to complete (Govekar & Govekar, 2002). While volunteering is generally seen as coming from a place of good intentions, we cannot assume all work in need of completion by volunteers is viewed in similarly positive lights, by all. “Many individuals volunteer for a particular organization or even for a particular job within an organization. If the volunteer position they are interested in is not available, we cannot assume that people can simply be shifted to a different organization or position.” (Govekar & Govekar, 2002, p. 37).

When examining volunteerism, one must note two separate classes of volunteers, “those who are primarily other-oriented and intrinsically motivated, and those who are primarily self-oriented and extrinsically motivated.” (Stukas et al., 2016, p. 251). Omoto and Snyder’s conceptual model of the volunteer process depicts volunteerism as a multifaceted phenomenon, situated and operating between multiple levels of analysis which unfold over time. On an individual level, the model shows the individual psychological processes of volunteers, highlighting the initial decision to get involved, seeking opportunities of involvement, engaging in volunteering for a period, eventually ceasing their efforts (Omoto & Snyder, 2002). For the application of theories of volunteerism in this thesis, the theory is useful to analyse the motivations behind decisions made by individuals to voluntarily work for the IWT. The theory is used to examine which personal values and motivations contribute to IWT volunteers' decisions to offer their services when not obligated to.

2.2.3 Organisational Commitment

The next theory to be examined is organisational commitment. An individual, from a behavioural approach, may attain a state of commitment resulting from committing behaviours, making it difficult to disengage from certain lines of activity (Brown, 1996). In a study on commitment to voluntary urban conservation, regarding an organisational environment's influence on commitment to volunteerism, personal, community and social motivations were found to be important (Asah & Blahna, 2013). Organisational commitment is characterised by a strong agreement with values and goals of an organisation, willingness to work hard for the organisation and clear wishes to remain a member (Mowday et al., 1979). A committed attitude may contribute to behaviours that, as a result, reinforce attitudes in a self-reinforcing cycle. It is assumed by organisations that high employee commitment is good for the organisation, improving overall chances of organisational survival (Swailes, 2002). To explore the extent to which those working within the IWT identify with the organisation's values and overall mission, the theory of organisational commitment will be applied to this dissertation, allowing an investigation into whether it influences volunteers dedication and involvement with conservation activities.

2.2.4 Environmental Identity and Values

The third theory to discuss are those of environmental identity and values. Previous research has shown that individuals' climate actions are influenced by identities and values of groups they belong to, such memberships form integral aspects of individuals' self concept or identity, reflecting a definition of self within terms of a group membership (Bouman et al., 2021). The emergence of a concern for habitat loss occurs most frequently in childhood (Chawla, 1999). Identities motivate green behaviour, with environmental identity reflecting the extent to which people indicate environmentalism as central to their identity, numerous studies showing environmental identities increase engagement in pro-environmental behaviour (Gatersleben et al., 2014). Support or opposition to certain environmental issues can hinge on group membership and identification, various groups regularly conflicting over environmental issues. Tensions reflect the influence that group belonging and social context have on environmental actions, environmental behaviour determined in large part by group membership (Fielding & Hornsey, 2016). Other conceptualizations of values relate to individuals' interactions with the world. “There are no such things as values. There are rather various ways in which individuals, processes and places matter, our various modes of relating to them, and the various considerations that enter into our deliberations about action.” (O'Neill et al., 2008, p. 1). To understand volunteers in the IWTs personal connections to nature, whether their environmental values influence decisions to volunteer, the theory of environmental values and identities is employed, being useful to investigate whether personal values of those working within the IWT align with that of the organisation.

2.2.5 Intrinsic Motivation

The final theory to be discussed is that of intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivations to volunteer refer to actions taken by individuals, due to inherent interest, or inherent satisfaction, with the individual enjoying the act in itself (Finkelstien, 2009). Higher levels of intrinsic motivation are linked to having prosocial personalities, internal personal motivations to volunteer, and the creation of a role identity by the volunteer (Finkelstien, 2009). Social capital created by voluntary participation is clearly linked to motivations inducing volunteers to engage in non-obligatory work, intrinsic motivations allowing volunteers to establish relationships which may be characterised by significant levels of familiarity (Degli Antoni, 2009). Individuals

engaging in activities due to personal interest, of their own volition are intrinsically motivated. When an activity meets the psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness, with relatedness referring to people's connections to those around them, it contributes to intrinsic motivation (Nencini et al., 2016). Qualitative interviews have been called for, in order to understand volunteer motivations, helping improve volunteer retention and recruitment efforts (Asah et al., 2014). The five main forms of environmental volunteering: activism, education, monitoring, restoration and sustainable living, are more likely to attain long term success when they allow volunteers to pursue their own specific interests, feeling like they are making a difference, simultaneously achieving social contact (Measham & Barnett, 2008). This thesis applies the theory of intrinsic motivation to assess factors that contribute to a sense of enjoyment and fulfilment in the work of volunteers at the IWT. Doing so will allow the research to assess the relationship between volunteers' intrinsic motivation and their continued commitment to the conservation efforts of the IWT.

2.2.6 Conclusion

The key theories underpinning this research; volunteerism and prosocial behaviour, organisational commitment, environmental identities and values, and intrinsic motivation, are outlined in this theoretical framework. In conjunction, these concepts provide the theoretical lens through which this thesis examines IWT volunteer engagement. The analysis section is built upon the conceptual and theoretical foundations provided by the literature review and theoretical framework. In order to interpret the interconnected organisational and individual elements of influence to volunteer engagement, Chapter 2 provided the necessary contextual background to proceed. Chapter 3 delves into the methodological approach utilised to practically examine these elements, explaining the philosophy, case selection, approach, design, data collection, operationalisation and analysis choices made to complete this thesis.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Philosophy

The way researchers approach the creation and understanding of knowledge is significant within any research. As a researcher, it is vital to articulate and comprehend one's view-point in terms of the nature of reality, what type of knowledge may be acquired, and how we gain this knowledge. These are the components of a research paradigm (Rehman & Alhorthi, 2016). A paradigm "represents the worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the "world", the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationship to the world and its parts." (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 107). The basic belief system and theoretical framework, the paradigm, holds assumptions regarding the ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods of a research design (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). The ontological question in research relates to the nature and form of reality, what exists that we may learn about. The epistemology relates to the nature of the relationship between the researcher and topic of interest. The methodology relates to how the researcher seeks to uncover the knowledge they believe may be created (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

In contrast to both positivism and post-positivism, constructivism proceeds from a relativist ontological position, where realities are understood based upon "multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature, and dependant for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding the construction." (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, pp. 110-111). This research sought to create new knowledge based upon communication with and observation of volunteers at the IWT, using expressions of their perceptions of realities, building knowledge based upon the expressed realities of those involved. The epistemology associated with a constructivist paradigm is transactional and subjectivist, where the researcher and topic of research are interactively linked, the findings created resulting from these interactions, as the study proceeds (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This research could not have happened without the researcher having direct contact with IWT volunteers, listening to their thoughts during the research process, creating new knowledge through interaction based research. The methodology coming as a result of the application of the constructivist paradigm are hermeneutical and dialectical, the various individual constructions sought in such research

only being attained through interactions between and among the researcher and those being researched (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Through direct contact with volunteers, knowledge was constructed vis-a-vis the co-creation of data through the researcher's observations, and interviewing volunteers and staff, with participants using the platform to express individual thoughts on the research topic. As such, the chosen philosophical paradigm of this research is constructivist.

3.2 Case Selection and Sampling

The research for this dissertation was conducted during an internship at the IWT, an environmental NGO, working in nature advocacy and the protection of Irish wildlife and habitats. The population of a study is described as the elements under study, the elements being the units of analysis. These elements may be people, but they could also be schools, households, or any other unit (Kalton, 2021). For the purposes of this research, the population is defined as those working within the IWT, as volunteers and paid staff.

Sampling in research is described as the selection of a case for study (Curtis et al., 2000). Ideally in a research study, the best approach would be to investigate a problem using the entire population. Practically, it is often impossible to study the entire population (Acharya et al., 2013). Consequently, "we study a "sample" which is sufficiently large and representative of the entire population. A sample is a subset of the population, selected to be representative of the larger population." (Acharya et al., 2013, p. 330). The population under study in this research are volunteers and staff of the IWT, each of which make up distinct subsets within the research population.

In order to attain data necessary to answer the research question, '*What are the essential elements which influence volunteer engagement at the Irish Wildlife Trust, and what may be improved in terms of organisational practices, to enhance volunteer involvement and satisfaction?*', non-probability sampling was decided upon. Non-probability samples are not necessarily chosen to know more broadly about a population, but rather to extend or deepen the knowledge of the sample itself (Uprichard, 2013).

As this research was conducted in collaboration with the IWT, there was no random element to the case and sample selection. The sampling method most applicable to the research aims was purposive sampling. “Purposive sampling strategies move away from any random form of sampling and are strategies to make sure that specific kinds of cases of those that could possibly be included are part of the final sample in the research study.” (Campbell et al., 2020, p. 654). Purposive sampling relies on the researchers judgement for selecting participants, and “can help researchers justify selections based on analytical, logical or theoretical grounds. Purposive sampling can be useful in qualitative research that has multiple phases and/ or aims.” (Berndt, 2020, p. 226). In the selection of participants to interview, 4 out of 5 staff of the IWT were interviewed, the non-interviewed staff being part-time, dealing with financial aspects of the organisation, thus rarely engaging with volunteers. Within the cohort of volunteers interviewed, those with varying roles were chosen, including a chair of a local branch, board member, and several volunteers primarily offering their time at public-engagement events.

3.3 Research Approach

There exist three main research approaches a researcher may take in their research: Inductive, deductive and abductive. In a deductive approach, the researcher begins from a general set of premises, moving from these premises toward specific conclusions, the conclusion necessarily follows analytically from the premises (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010). Inductive reasoning moves in the opposite direction, from particulars to generalisations. When the researcher takes generalisations from their data set, their inferences are inductive (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010). Abductive reasoning relates to the inferences of hypotheses based upon explanatory considerations, in the sense that the inference is a sort of reasoning from which one draws categorical conclusions from a set of premises (Dellsén, 2024).

For the purposes of this dissertation, an inductive research approach is employed. When the social sciences emerged in the 20th century, social researchers became wary of deduction, being critical of the approach which offered a cause-effect link to be made, while not comprehending the various human interpretations of their social worlds (Saunders et al., 2019). This study deals directly with comprehensions of specific perceptions of the social worlds of staff and volunteers at the IWT. “Research using an inductive approach to reasoning is likely to be particularly

concerned with the context in which such events take place. Therefore, the study of a small sample of subjects might be more appropriate than a large number as with the deductive approach." (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 155). This research entails the analysis of a small sample size, nine total participants. The idea of the research was to analyse the perceptions of these individuals, within the context of their areas of action, as they relate to volunteerism. For staff of the organisation, their relationships with and management of volunteers were most important. For volunteers, using their perceptions to assist the development of new strategies to potentially improve their own, and others future experiences of volunteering within the organisation were key. The perspectives of individuals involved in this research were vital to formation of theories for improvement, an inductive approach being most suitable to achieve this.

3.4 Research Design

For this research, a case study research strategy was employed, the specific case being that of the IWT. Case study research is versatile in accommodating different research philosophies, offering a unique platform for various studies to generate improved insights into areas of inquiry. They have the capacity to tailor approaches, addressing wide-ranging questions asking the what, why and how of issues, helping the researcher to describe, explain, explore, evaluate and theorise about complex issues in context (Harrison et al., 2017). Case studies are conducted for varying reasons. At the basic level, individual cases may be the subject of interest, for example the examination of individual organisations, aiming to improve their function. When applying case study methods as a research strategy, they are usually carried out with the aim of generating findings that are applicable to multiple cases. Case studies are appropriate as a research strategy where a variety of relationships and factors are at play, where uncertainty remains as to which factors and relationships are most important, and when such relationships and factors are directly observable (Fidel, 1984). The case study method is most useful "for adding to existing experience and humanistic understanding. Its characteristics match the "readiness" people have for added experience." (Stake, 1978, p. 2). Another strength of the case study is that a variety of sources can be used in data collection, quantitative or qualitative, including the likes of documentation, archival records, interviews, direct-observation, participant observation and physical artefacts (Chetty, 1996). In this research, a qualitative approach was taken to data analysis, through use of semi-structured interviews and participant observations. The nature of

case studies, specifically single case studies such as this, is to focus deeply on a phenomenon in its context, “case study research always renders richly detailed and extensive descriptions of the phenomenon under study.” (van Thiel, 2014, p. 87).

3.5 Data Collection

3.5.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are an effective qualitative data collection measure, when the researcher is aiming to attain deeper understanding of participants' unique perspectives, rather than seeking general conceptualisations of phenomenons (Adeoye & Olenik, 2021). This research sought to understand volunteers' specific experiences with their work, why they choose to involve themselves in non-obligatory efforts, their values and identities contributing to this decision, semi-structured interviews being key in gathering this information. Semi-structured interviews are a popular research method due to their versatility and flexibility (Kallio et al., 2016). One of the main benefits of semi-structured interviews is allowing an interview to have a primary focus, simultaneously offering the researcher flexibility to explore important ideas that emerge during the course of the interview (Adeoye & Olenik, 2021). Two interview guides were created during the data collection phase, one tailored to volunteers, another for staff. The volunteer interview guide was designed to attain understanding of individual volunteers' identities, motivations and values contributing to their desire to work in conservation. The staff interview guide was designed to clarify the organisation's internal perspectives on their volunteer engagement strategies. The flexibility and versatility of the semi-structured interview was key throughout the process of conducting interviews, some questions outlined in the initial interview guides becoming redundant due to participants having answered them, through in depth answers to previous questions, and new questions frequently emerging based on participants answers, leading to useful and unexpected perspectives being recorded.

Due to time constraints, and aiming to achieve the highest quality data possible, the focus was not to interview as many participants as possible, rather focusing on those most willing and eager to participate. Within the staff of the IWT, four out of the five paid staff of the organisation were interviewed. Names of staff are anonymised. The first interview was conducted with the

General Manager of the organisation (K.F). Following this, the Administrative Assistant (F.V), the Marine Advocacy Officer (G.C), and the Communications Officer (E.N) were interviewed.

For the volunteers, participants were less easily accessible than staff. As part of the research internship, the researcher was involved in several outreach events with the organisation. The first of these was Bord Bia Bloom (Bloom), an event in Phoenix Park, Dublin, with a focus on horticulture, food and drink, and sustainability. The IWT organised an engagement stand at Bloom in order to engage the public, speaking to citizens about their efforts to preserve biodiversity, recruit new members, while also organising several talks at a Sustainable Living Stage. Volunteers attended each day from the 30th of May to the 4th of June 2024. During this time, the researcher made connections with various volunteers, upon which contacts were exchanged and interviews organised. 5 total volunteers were interviewed for the purposes of data collection. The researcher distinguishes three separate sub-categories of volunteers who assist the organisation; branch volunteers, members of the board of directors, and general volunteers. At least one volunteer from each sub-category was interviewed in order to gather a wide variety of perspectives, from individuals who have different voluntary roles within the organisation.

3.5.2 Participant Observation

According to Kaulich (2005), participant observation can be defined as “the process enabling researchers to learn about the activities of the people under study in the natural setting through observing and participating in those activities.” (p. 2). During the IWT internship, the researcher acted as researcher and volunteer, working at four volunteer involved public-outreach events. The aim of employing participant observation is the development of holistic comprehension of the situation being studied, as accurate and objective as possible within the bounds of the method's limitations (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). Through interactions with volunteers, and actions as a volunteer, the researcher built connections with and understandings of volunteers at the IWT, concurrently building a picture of what the volunteer experience pertains on a personal level. Participant observation offered the researcher clarity regarding lived experiences of volunteers, experiencing first hand the inter-personal and inter-group dynamic within the volunteer experience. Combining participant observations and semi-structured interviews allowed collection of complementary data, contributing toward research validity.

During the research process, the author acted as researcher, intern and volunteer. As researcher, the intention was collaboration with other IWT stakeholders, staff and volunteers, to further develop and improve the volunteer engagement strategies at the organisation. Participant observation was key in acquiring thorough understanding of volunteerism within the IWT. As intern, the researcher's tasks included writing news articles for the IWTs magazine, assisting report writing (topics included media exposure, forestry laws in Ireland, conditions necessary for branch network expansion), and attendance of weekly meetings. While volunteering, the researcher attended four public outreach events in 2024 (Bloom, the Rose Festival, Heritage Week and the IFI Family Festival), which involved working with volunteers, engaging the public, signing up new members and co-learning with and from volunteers. In attempting to enhance levels of trust and objectivity, every effort was made to mitigate changes in behaviour in other participants due to the observer's presence. Reactivity, when a research subject alters their behaviour due to the presence of observers, is a frequent criticism of participant observational data (Spano, 2005). To minimise this, the researcher explained to volunteers that there was to be written a thesis on IWT volunteerism, that it would be personally un-invasive, it being the belief of the researcher that all participants were comfortable with the presence of an observing participant.

Ability of the researcher to achieve a substantial level of immersion within the research setting is a strength of participant observation (Saunders et al., 2016). For this research, the observations were overt, meaning "the researcher is open about the fact that she or he is conducting research" (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 358). Upon introduction, the first thing the researcher mentioned to other volunteers was the research and its topic. Conducting participant observation, simultaneously volunteering and fulfilling general internship tasks, the research role necessarily became that of 'participant-as-observer'. "In the role of participant as observer you would both take part and reveal your purpose as researcher." (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 360). This pertained to casual, informal interactions with volunteers at outreach events, and meetings and events attended by staff. While at Bloom, the researcher kept field notes, tracking the apparent organisational practices relating to volunteers, interpersonal dynamics among volunteers, and between staff and volunteers. Insights into the relationships between volunteers and staff, the

communicative dimensions within an eNGO context, coupled with volunteer role perceptions, were recorded in the field notes. These notes gave clarity regarding necessary questions to ask during interviews, further substantiating results.

Employing a participant-as-observer role while collecting data offered various unique, less obvious perspectives, helpful in answering the research questions. Communicating directly with volunteers informally allowed the research deeper understanding of motivational influences underlying individuals' decisions to continuously volunteer. Factors like group belonging, enjoyment gained from activities different to one's work and opportunities to co-create knowledge, all became clear through participant observation.

To answer the research questions, the researcher had to become acquainted with volunteers. Bloom (May 30th- June 3rd 2024) was the first point of contact with volunteers. Acting as participant-as-observer allowed the researcher embeddedness within lived experiences of individuals whose perspectives were necessary to answer the questions. Building trust, observing volunteer behaviour in natural settings and getting to know individual volunteers was crucial for finding willing interview participants. Through informal conversations, participant observation allowed the researcher to become immersed in volunteer experiences, offering contextual understanding of the phenomena most prominent in this research. Building rapport with individuals to be subsequently interviewed allowed tailoring the interview guide, so answers provided would sufficiently address the research problem.

The participant observation method is frequently cited as requiring a combination of other data collection methods to be useful (Jackson, 1983). In seeking triangulation, combining this method with semi-structured interviews was necessary. The research intention was to analyse volunteers' perceptions regarding lived experience within the organisation, offering pointers to improve experiences of IWT volunteerism. Informed consent for observation was acquired and anonymity assured, while every effort to minimise researcher bias was made.

3.6 Operationalisation

In Chapter 1, the four sub-questions, coupled with the primary research question this thesis sought to answer were outlined. The sub-questions are:

1. From an IWT staff perspective, to what extent do the current engagement strategies of the organisation, such as recruitment, support systems and community outreach, influence volunteer involvement?
2. What determining factors, including individual characteristics such as identities, motivations and values, do IWT volunteers view as significant to their engagement with the organisation?
3. How do IWT volunteers assess the current engagement practices of the organisation, and what improvements to enhance their involvement, satisfaction and ability to contribute to the organisation do they suggest?
4. How are the supports and resources provided by the IWT perceived by their volunteers, and to what extent do these mechanisms influence their overall engagement and effectiveness within the organisation?

Several key concepts were derived from the sub-questions, the first being *volunteerism and pro-social behaviour.* As described in the theoretical framework, volunteerism is a productive activity, said to be similar to other forms of work, not an act of consumption, nor a leisure pursuit. It involves collective action, often aiming toward achieving a collective good (Wilson & Musick, 1997). Volunteerism involves various individual interactions, in this case, interactions between the IWT as an organisation, and individuals assisting it voluntarily.

Another concept vital to this research is that of *identities, motivations and values.* Identities and values have been shown to motivate green behaviour, an environmental identity reflecting the level to which individuals perceive environmentalism as central to their identity (Gatersleben et al., 2014). An individual's engagement in an activity resulting from personal interests, emerging from their own volition is said to be intrinsically motivated (Nencini et al., 2016). Understanding this concept may enhance the potential for continuous volunteer commitment within the IWT.

The final concept is *perspectives of support and engagement.* Volunteers' perceptions, coupled with staff conceptualisations of this concept were key to identifying improvements of volunteer engagement practices. Management may seek to integrate volunteer perspectives on this concept into future strategies, improving the volunteer experience, as such, enhancing the potential of volunteer impact.

3.6.1 Volunteerism and Pro-Social Behaviour

In order to attain insight into the concept of volunteerism and pro-social behaviour, it was paramount to uncover staff at the IWTs understandings of volunteerism within the context of the organisation. The initial question asked to staff on this concept was:

1. Could you explain which strategies the Irish Wildlife Trust currently employs in order to engage with your volunteers?

This question sought to gain clarity on how staff communicate with volunteers regarding upcoming activities or events of the organisation, goals the IWT are working toward in terms of engaging with volunteers, what is successful and what needs improvement.

2. Does the Irish Wildlife Trust actively recruit or try to attract new volunteers, or do the volunteers more so approach the organisation and seek to volunteer through their own means?

This question aimed to uncover whether the IWT is working toward increasing its volunteer base. The intention was to understand whether the IWT currently needs more volunteers, and if so, how they go about acquiring volunteers. The initial expectation was that there may be a need for more volunteers, and effort tailored to achieving this.

3. Are there any strategies currently in place to retain people who already have volunteered with the Irish Wildlife Trust, and to keep them coming back to help?

This question sought to offer insight into the nature of organisational efforts to engage with individuals currently volunteering at the organisation. The expectation was that there may be clearly outlined practices within the IWT management to ensure volunteer engagement and retain motivated individuals.

Several other questions were asked to IWT staff related to volunteerism and pro-social behaviour, on topics such as value alignment between volunteers and the IWT, efforts to gather feedback from volunteers, communication channels between volunteers and the organisation, and support and resources for volunteers. With four staff at the IWT answering both the outlined questions, and many more on the topics above, through thematic analysis of the interview transcripts, sub-question 1 was answered.

3.6.2 Identities, Motivations and Values

Identities, motivations and values is the second concept to be operationalised. A number of questions related to this concept were asked to the 5 volunteers interviewed, the first being:

1. Would you say a personal connection to nature has contributed to your motivation to volunteer?

This question is intended to allow for volunteers' expressions of individual relationships to the natural world, outlining whether such relationships are a motivational influence within their decision to volunteer. As the IWT is an NGO working to conserve and protect Irish biodiversity, the researcher expected that most volunteers would feel their personal relationship to nature contributed to their desire to volunteer.

2. Would you say that the Irish Wildlife Trusts values align with your own, or do you feel there are any discrepancies between how the organisation sees the world and how you do?

This question addressed the topic of volunteer-IWT value alignment, allowing volunteers the opportunity to explain their views regarding the relationship of their personal views to the IWTs

organisational perspectives. The researcher believed prior to asking this question, that to a large extent, value alignment would be present, although it was expected that there be slight discrepancies.

3. When you initially decided to volunteer with the Irish Wildlife Trust, what was the catalyst for your decision to do so?

This question aimed to uncover initial motivational influences at play at the beginning of each participant's volunteering journeys. The researcher expected to find a variety of such catalysts, although an appreciation of, and desire to protect nature, were to the fore of expectations.

There were various other questions asked to volunteers related to this concept. Topics included whether specific interests contribute to motivation to volunteer, personal goals, social aspects of volunteering and facilitatory practices on the part of the IWT to enhance volunteering experiences. The answers to these questions allowed for volunteers expressions of their identities, motivations and values, how these contribute to their desire to work with the IWT, allowing the researcher to answer sub-question 2.

3.6.3 Perspectives on Support & Engagement

Perspectives on support and engagement is the final concept central to this research. In order to understand this concept, the following questions were asked:

1. Did you experience any obstacles or challenges when you first decided to volunteer with the Irish Wildlife Trust, or even throughout your voluntary career?

This question aimed to uncover perceived barriers to initial and longer term engagement with the IWT. Expectations for answers were difficulties in acquiring a voluntary position, uncertainty as to responsibilities and time constraints.

2. Regarding your experience of communication with the Irish Wildlife Trust, have you felt it to be adequate, or is it sometimes unclear or suboptimal?

The intention of this question was uncovering volunteer perspectives on the communicative dimensions of the IWTs volunteer engagement strategies. It was expected that varying opinions would be expressed on this topic, although overall, the researcher expected positive comments from volunteers.

3. In your role as a volunteer, do you feel that the Irish Wildlife Trust provides enough support and resources to help you in your role?

It was necessary to gather volunteer insights into the supports the IWT offer which are facilitatory to volunteering. Different volunteers have different roles, responsibilities and levels of experience, thus requiring differing levels of support and resources to fulfil their role requirements. As such, expectations for answers were broad, as branch volunteers, board members and regular volunteers are likely to have different needs and desires in terms of support.

Numerous other questions on the concept of identities, motivations and values were asked to volunteers over the course of the interviews, ranging from perceptions on commitment, measures the IWT could employ to enhance volunteer satisfaction, to factors retaining volunteers. Questions on these topics were crucial to answering sub-questions 3 & 4.

3.7 Data Analysis Approach

The interpretation and classification of linguistic material, with the aim of making statements regarding explicit and implicit structures and dimensions of meaning-making within a data set is at the core of qualitative data analysis (Flick, 2014). “Qualitative data analysis is applied to discover and describe issues in the field or structures and processes in routines and practices.” (Flick, 2014, p. 5). Within the qualitative analysis of the 9 total interviews (4 staff, 5 volunteers), a constructivist paradigm was applied. This entails a presumption on the part of the researcher of the existence of multiple realities, with all individuals experiencing these realities differently (Grbich, 2013). An exploration into individual interpretations and their sense-making of these experiences in terms of their own life events, and the context of such situations, their position

within wider social environments, is thus the focus of such research (Gbrich, 2013). Within the individual experiences of staff and volunteers at the IWT, it is the belief of the researcher that indeed, multiple realities exist, concomitantly requiring further understanding to answer the research questions.

To achieve this, the interviews were recorded on the researcher's smartphone. All interviews were conducted remotely over Google-Meet. Upon completion of the interviews, audio files were uploaded to Microsoft-Word, where the researcher used the transcribe tool to format the audio files into text. Due to a combination of the interviews being conducted remotely, the fact that the researcher and all interviewees had Irish accents, once finished, all transcripts had to be manually corrected by the researcher, playing the audio files while correcting mistakes in the transcripts. For example, 'Irish Lead Leftist', 'Edge of the Sea', and 'Irish Well of Trust' were some of Microsoft's interpretations of 'Irish Wildlife Trust'.

Upon completion of transcription, the coding process began. A naming convention was applied to staff (initials) and volunteers (numbers) to maintain anonymity. The coding software, Atlas.ti was considered for use, the researcher opting instead to add codes manually as comments on Google-Docs copies of each transcript. This played a part in the familiarisation with the data-set, allowing potential themes for further analysis to emerge through immersion in the data, leading to a total of 982 codes.

The researcher proceeded to put each question topic asked into an excel sheet, after which, each code relevant to that topic was placed beside it. This allowed the researcher to visualise the codes, from which themes were developed for thematic analysis in Chapter 4. The researcher proceeded to follow Braun & Clarke's (2006) six step guide for conducting thematic analysis, entailing initial familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes within the codes, reviewing the themes, defining the themes, and writing up the analysis.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

4.1 Introduction

Leading from the methodology chapter, which outlined the philosophical underpinnings of this thesis, the case selection and sampling decisions, research design, methodological choices, data collection and analysis choices, this chapter explains the findings obtained following the steps outlined above.

Through the process of familiarisation with 9 interview transcripts (4 staff, 5 volunteer interviews), observations made in the field, and subsequent summarisation of transcripts, ideas for potential themes emerged. Once the summaries were complete, each transcript was coded individually, upon completion a total of 982 codes were acquired. These codes, upon further analysis were grouped into 4 themes. This chapter outlines each theme, why each emerged, and how the theme contributes to answering the research questions. Quotations from the 9 transcripts are included, and references to observations offer depth and rigour to the findings, allowing each participant the opportunity for their perceptions to contribute to the findings of this research.

By identifying codes across the dataset of 9 total interviews, four key themes emerged, all requiring understanding for the research questions to be answered. Each theme reflects essential elements which impact volunteer engagement at the IWT. *Theme 1: Volunteer Engagement and Communication* delves into staff and volunteer perspectives on communication within the organisation, and the impact of feedback and recognition in enhancing engagement. *Theme 2: Volunteer Identities, Motivations and Values* explores the driving forces within individuals desires to assist the IWT, and the role of individual-organisation value alignment in sustaining engagement. *Theme 3: Recruitment, Retention and Barriers to Volunteering* analyses the problems faced by the IWT in their endeavours to attract and subsequently retain volunteers, while addressing organisational and individuals barriers to continuous participation. *Theme 4: Organisational Structure and Volunteer Management* deals with how resource provision, organisational support and branch-network coordination by staff plays into organisational

cohesion and volunteer satisfaction. Via provision of in-depth volunteer and staff perspectives, coupled with observations from the field, these themes offer a broad account of volunteerism perspectives in context, which offer key insights into potential areas of improvement.

4.2 Theme 1: Volunteer Engagement and Communication

The first theme examines the influence of current IWT communicative endeavours on volunteer motivation, engagement and role satisfaction. 'Communication Methods and Challenges', the first sub-theme, explores the strengths and weaknesses of IWT organisational communication, denoting productive practices while exploring aspects where consistency and clarity may lack. The second sub-theme, 'Recognition and Feedback Opportunities' delves into organisational acknowledgement of volunteer effort, exploring the potential of feedback opportunities in enhancing continuous engagement. In conjunction, insight as to how communication and recognition impact the experience of volunteering and their contribution to sustained involvement are outlined via the sub-themes.

4.2.1 Sub-Theme 1: Communication Methods and Challenges

4.2.1.1 Introduction

This sub-theme examines the communications methods employed by the IWT to engage their volunteers, concurrently exploring difficulties faced in ensuring effective communication, from both volunteer and staff perspectives. Via assessing both interpersonal and digital communication methods and perceived effectiveness of both, the sub-theme identifies organisational practices which either facilitate or impede volunteer engagement, involvement and satisfaction, crucial to address in order to answer sub-questions 1, 3 and 4.

Individuals, as a result of advancements in communication technology, are able to access information and connect with others irrespective of time and location, lessening the impact of physical distance and time constraints. Such advancements have reshaped interpersonal interactions, impacting relations within groups, including volunteer organisations, and the engagement between these groups and wider society (Eimhjellen et al., 2018). For the IWT, direct communication with volunteers, according to K.F, involves;

"primarily email, direct email to volunteers we already know, or mass email on our newsletter, and the magazine, yeah, that would be the way of communicating."

While communication is essential for the IWT to effectively operate, staff and volunteers may nonetheless face barriers to good communication, such as over-reliance on digital, lack of direct engagement, or gaps in communication. Communication with volunteers may influence their engagement with the IWT and thus their role satisfaction within the organisation.

4.2.1.2 Staff Perspectives on Communication Methods

As K.F indicated, email contact with volunteers is the primary means of communication in circumstances where volunteer input is necessary, email being scalable with multiple volunteers contacted at once, this method less time consuming than individual phone calls, according to K.F;

"We wouldn't regularly phone volunteers, no… there's not a structure of phoning people."

This indicated the use of digital, expansible communications overcomes the barrier of staff time constraint. Aside from direct volunteer contact, social media is a key component of the communicative dimensions of the IWT, the organisation having a large following across multiple social media platforms, Emily Nolan highlighting that;

"Social media is useful in terms of connecting with people on a regular, daily basis."

Thus, social media's capacity to scale wider public outreach is useful, keeping the public aware of the IWTs endeavours, enhancing engagement. Nonetheless, broad, wide-ranging communication may lack the personal touch necessary to enhance volunteer engagement, E.N elaborating;

"In person, I feel like it can be more valuable for people, especially because people are kind of over-saturated with information on social media in general."

While general communication with volunteers occurs digitally, while in attendance of Bloom, working alongside staff and IWT volunteers, the researcher observed the value of in person communication. On day 3, volunteers faced a challenging, confrontational encounter with a member of the public. Staff handled the occurrence professionally, facilitating an informal debrief for volunteers to directly communicate with staff about the situation, offering support and ensuring the volunteers were okay. So, while digital communication is a key component of the IWTs communication strategy, it may create distance between staff and volunteers, although indeed, efficient and scalable. However, while in the field, the researcher noted that communication between staff and volunteers was well regarded. As such, the IWT's use of digital communication efficiently enables the organisation to coordinate with volunteers remotely, and social media allows the organisation to reach a wide audience. However, tangible, in-person interactions remain crucial in fostering engagement, through building trust and a sense of support, especially in challenging circumstances.

4.2.1.3 Volunteer Perspectives on Communication Methods

Moving away from staff perceptions of IWT communications, understanding how volunteers perceive organisational communications is a necessary topic to cover, and based on volunteer interviews, challenges remain for the IWT to overcome to ensure organisational communications enhance engagement. One such challenge highlighted by Volunteer 3 is the inconsistency in communications coming from different branches, V3 explaining;

"There isn't a tied up communications between the branches and the head office and so it seems very piecemeal."

The unstructured nature of the communications coming from the different branches indicates a need for clearer communication guidelines coming from staff for the volunteer run branches, which would contribute to more cohesive messaging from the organisation as a whole. This relates back to the supposed weaknesses in the conservation communities efforts to communicate conservation messaging to the public, and failures to influence public behaviour (Wright et al., 2015). Although staff intentions regarding branch communications may indicate an offer of

autonomy, ensuring a level of consistency from all IWT branches would be beneficial to enhancing engagement, highlighting a need for broader two-way participation in the communicative dimensions of the IWT. As V2 explains;

"I think that with any communications strategy you need to think about who you're communicating with, what's working, what's not working… then break it down and say, 'well, what is our communications strategy with each of these groups?'"

Through participatory processes, accurate understandings of problems requiring addressing may be generated, and more feasible solutions found when diverse perspectives are accounted for in the knowledge making process (Huttunen et al., 2022). From the volunteer perspective, it is indicated that communication issues, such as inconsistencies from branch outreach may be mitigated by more dialogue between staff and volunteers. In essence, volunteer perspectives indicate that improved consistency on communications, including between branches and staff, would enhance engagement. Outlining communication guidelines and encouraging increased dialogue between volunteers and staff may improve cohesion within the IWT, contributing to volunteer involvement and engagement.

4.2.1.4 Bridging Communication Gaps: Potential Improvements

For the IWT, improving communication with volunteers may be a worthy endeavour, although barriers to achieving this remain. The IWTs use of digital media for contacting volunteers may be efficient, scalable, and not overly time or labour intensive, but it may lack the personal touch that some volunteers desire. Staff time came up as a recurring barrier to more personal volunteer communication throughout the interviews, there being only four full time staff at the organisation, none of whose job is specifically volunteer orientated. F.V suggests the need for;

"new staff dedicated to work with volunteers"

This could potentially improve communication with volunteers. In the absence of this, the likes of regular zoom meetings or a whatsapp group chat are potentially efficient ways of maintaining direct communication with volunteers, simultaneously being financially viable and simple to set

up. Through improvements in regular, personalised communication between staff and volunteers, engagement may thus be enhanced.

4.2.2 Sub-Theme 2: Recognition and Feedback Opportunities

4.2.2.1 Introduction

In order to offer insight into organisational practices which may influence both volunteer retention and motivation, this sub-theme explores IWT volunteer and staff perceptions on feedback and recognition mechanisms at the organisation. Such insights will be key to answering sub-question 1, 3 and 4, through enhancing understanding of how present feedback and recognition mechanisms influence volunteer satisfaction, and why standardising these practices may further enhance involvement and meaningful engagement within the IWT.

4.2.2.2 Staff Perceptions on Volunteer Recognition and Feedback

Viewed through the lens of social exchange theory, interactions occur via exchange of cost, what one gives, and rewards, what one receives (Phillips, 1982). For volunteering, individuals offer their time, not in pursuit of financial remuneration, but they may desire some form of recognition for their actions. This theme will explore staff and volunteer understandings of recognition, and discuss opportunities to give feedback within the IWT. This is crucial to understand, as recognising volunteer's efforts may contribute to an individual's community identification, which has been found to sustain individuals commitment to voluntary roles (Bowe et al., 2020).

Acknowledging the effort given by volunteers in fulfilling their roles at the IWT emerged as a key theme through interview analysis, staff and volunteer. While discussing mechanisms to enhance volunteer satisfaction, G.C pointed out the value of giving volunteer's credit for their work, explaining how they;

"don't want to, you know, be volunteering and doing stuff and then you never actually hear much about it.. It's always nice to see your work getting acknowledged."

While staff indeed acknowledge the importance of ensuring volunteers feel appreciated, it became clear that no formal structures are currently in place to systematically ensure recognition occurs. K.F explained that staff ensure;

"to thank them for their inputs and also we would routinely contact the same body of volunteers for events throughout the year to build up a relationship."

While acting as participant-as-observer, the researcher noted the presence of informal recognition within the staff of the IWT, witnessing volunteers being thanked for their assistance at the end of each day, and while completing tasks during the event. Although non-formalised recognition is clear within the case of the IWT, the lack of systematised acknowledgement for volunteer contributions may indicate opportunities to enhance volunteer engagement.

4.2.2.3 Volunteer Perceptions on Recognition and Feedback

Understanding the extent to which volunteer's feel valued, and the importance volunteer's place on opportunities to receive feedback and appreciation, may offer insight into organisational practices the IWT could implement to enhance volunteer involvement and satisfaction. In the absence of being specifically asked for feedback, V2 mentioned that the opportunity to offer reflections regarding their volunteering experience could be beneficial;

"I think a follow up thing, or on the day a little sheet, of what were the most common questions you were asked… was there anything difficult you were asked that might help us provide information to volunteers in the future?"

V2 highlights how the IWT could potentially improve future volunteering experiences by formalising the process of collecting feedback from volunteers. In terms of recognition and appreciation, it could be useful to note that not all volunteers who choose to work with the IWT do so out of a desire for recognition. V3, when asked about whether they felt appreciated in their roles, disregarded the importance of feeling appreciated for their desire to volunteer;

"You're not doing this for appreciation… You're not looking for a big pat on the back, you're looking to do good in the world."

During the researcher's time as participant-as-observer at Bloom, staff were noted as being consistently appreciative of volunteers' time. In the absence of a formalised structure for feedback, there were still opportunities for volunteers to engage directly with staff, and while informal, across the four days staff made an effort to acknowledge and thank volunteers for their help. While the perspectives of IWT volunteers indicate that recognition is not a key driver of the desire to volunteer, the value of potential opportunities to offer feedback, which may in turn improve future volunteering experiences, is valued by volunteers. Through offering structured opportunities to give feedback, the IWT may improve their volunteer engagement practices, ensuring volunteers feel heard. This may improve volunteer learning capacity and increase trust, the main outcomes of participation, as participatory processes value various perspectives and appreciate different stakeholder perspectives (de Vente et al., 2016).

4.3 Theme 2: Volunteer Identities, Motivations and Values

The personal characteristics influencing individuals' engagement with the IWT, and how such traits shape their experiences at the organisation are explored in theme 2. Sub-theme 1, 'Volunteer Identities and Motivations', explores the broad range of individual, other-oriented and conservation driven characteristics, which play into individuals' decisions to volunteer. 'Alignment of Volunteer and Organisational Values', the second sub-theme, explores the importance of volunteers and their host organisation holding similar view-points, how shared values may lead to a deeper sense of purpose, feelings of belonging and sustained engagement. In combination, theme 2 provides insight into the influence of varying motivations and value systems on volunteer commitment and satisfaction.

4.3.1 Sub-Theme 1: Volunteer Identities and Motivations

4.3.1.1 Introduction

In order to acquire insight into personal traits of influence within volunteer engagement, continuous involvement and role satisfaction, exploring IWT volunteers identities and motivations is crucial. As such, this sub-theme addresses both the extrinsic and intrinsic influences within individuals' decisions to volunteer, simultaneously exploring how the self-concept of the volunteers in question aligns with pro-environmental behaviours. Consequently, this sub-theme primarily relates to sub-question 2, as it addresses the influence of individual characteristics on volunteer commitment, simultaneously remaining relevant to sub-questions 3 and 4, by delving into ways engagement strategies may be managed to further utilise various volunteer motivations and individual differences.

An individual's conceptualization of 'self', the combination of their values, abilities, background, reference groups and roles may be defined as their identity (Grönlund, 2011). Understanding what makes up volunteer identities at the IWT may offer insights to why individuals give their time to the organisation. Motivation is when an individual is moved to do something, an individual active toward achieving a goal is motivated (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Understanding catalysts to initially volunteer, and factors sustaining motivation are of benefit to sustaining volunteer engagement. This theme delves into self-perceived identities and motivations of volunteers, identifying the underlying personal characteristics contributing to a desire to volunteer at the IWT.

4.3.1.2 Personal Identities of Volunteers

Among the IWT volunteers interviewed for this research, an interest in and care for the environment was clear among all. An overriding self-conceptualisation emerged from the interviews, this being that individuals felt a personal responsibility and desire to protect nature. For example, V2 told the researcher;

"I would personally feel very connected to the environment, to wildness and would feel strongly that it is critical for humanity not to let it disappear."

Meanwhile, V3 explained how;

"As a child, my mom always had me in nature, and so nature has always been a part of my world, my life."

Stewardship may thus be mentioned as a clear component of the identities of IWT volunteers. This indicated that the weight that volunteers attached to an identity compromised of a desire to protect nature, relative to other identities, was contributing to behaviour choices in accordance with the expectations of such an identity, as claimed by identity theorists (Stryker & Burke, 2000). During the researcher's time as participant-as-observer at Bloom, it was noted that one volunteer went beyond any expectations set by anybody other than themselves to express an identity of care for, and joy engaging with nature. The night prior to day 3, one volunteer went into their garden in search of snails, brought an A3 laminated sheet with a start and finish line, in order to organise snail races at the IWT engagement stand. This is a clear expression of an identity with love of nature at its centre, the joy of sharing nature with others, this volunteer linking their concept of self to the fulfillment of behaviours in line with their own role expectations, as identity theory claims one would (Hogg et al., 1995). As suggested by identity theorists, volunteers at the IWT seem to behave in a manner which is consistent with their self-conceptualisations (Stryker & Burke, 2000). As such, volunteers self perceived and expressed individual connections with nature act as an underlying force in their sustained engagement with volunteerism and stewardship behaviour.

4.3.1.3 Motivations for Volunteering

Among IWT volunteers, as with any behaviour or action, variations in underlying motivations to act exist. Intrinsic motivation, and innate tendency to seek out challenges and novelty, to exercise and improve one's capabilities and to learn and explore, were certainly present across the volunteer base (Ryan & Deci, 2000). V3 clearly backed up this statement, when asked whether they felt appreciated, disregarding the importance of appreciation, telling the researcher;

"you're not doing this for appreciation… It's an inner drive… It's an intrinsic motivation."

While not explicitly stating their motivation to be intrinsic, V1 described their lifelong affinity for nature to be a key motivating influence in their decision to volunteer;

"I've always had a high regard, and love I suppose for wildlife issues, for animals and planet."

As such, these volunteers can be seen to be engaging with their innate interests, meeting a challenge which engages their passions, exercising their capabilities as a consequence of an internal propensity, which is intrinsically motivated (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Therefore, intrinsic motivation within the IWT volunteer base manifests through the extent to which volunteering meets the individuals internal desire to act, acquire knowledge, expressing themselves through actions they find meaningful and aligning with their interests.

Conversely to intrinsic motivation to volunteer, there may simultaneously exist external influences within the decision to volunteer at the IWT, extrinsic motivations, characterised by engagement with an activity because it may result in an external outcome (Ryan & Deci, 2000). V5 for example, decided to volunteer to;

"meet some like minded people who have similar interests and viewpoints."

V4 mentioned that volunteering offers them an opportunity to do something different and unrelated to their professional life;

"It's completely different from what I'm doing at work… you can kind of turn off, you know?"

Clary (1998) classified this source of motivational influence to volunteer as the social function, with volunteering an opportunity to engage with others, and partake in activities viewed as important by others. It became clear through analysis of the interviews that while individuals may be intrinsically motivated, this does not nullify the potential for extrinsic motivation to be simultaneously present. For example, V3 explicitly stated being intrinsically motivated, however, as a board member, V3 told the researcher;

“I do want to get board experience and so work with the Irish Wildlife Trust has been really helpful for me in getting that experience.”

This can be linked to two of the motivational influences to volunteer defined by Clary (1998), the first being the understanding influence, the opportunity to gain new skills and exercise knowledge and abilities which could otherwise go unpracticed. The second could potentially be career motivation, with potential benefits to one's career coming as a result of volunteering.

Intrinsic motivation is clearly relevant to volunteer engagement, however, it does not exist in a vacuum. The presence of extrinsic motivational influences, such as social and learning opportunities, applying new skills, or partaking in something different to one’s career emphasises that the nature of volunteer engagement is indeed multi-faceted. IWT volunteers may be driven by a desire to see nature protected and affinity with the natural world, however, it is clear that professional, experiential and social benefits may also contribute to continuous volunteering within the IWT.

4.3.2 Sub-Theme 2: Alignment of Volunteer and Organisational Values

4.3.2.1 Introduction

To comprehend elements which foster, or indeed hinder engagement, understanding the degree to which volunteer values align with those of their host organisation is vital. Consequently, this sub-theme delves into how shared values contribute to volunteer retention and satisfaction, simultaneously addressing instances of perceived misalignment. Such insights are key to answering sub-question 2, through examining the extent to which individual beliefs influence engagement. By noting instances where IWT practices may improve, to further sustain volunteer involvement, the sub-theme is also relevant to sub-questions 3 and 4.

Understanding the extent to which individual values of IWT volunteers align with IWT organisational values may contribute to volunteer satisfaction and engagement. As such, this theme analyses the level to which such alignment is present, and instances where misalignment may exist. A common assertion about values is that attitudes and human sociality are shaped by

what individuals consider important to their lives (Boer & Fischer, 2013). Values are said to be the beliefs which work as guiding principles influencing how individuals behave (Parks & Guay, 2009). Consequently, the alignment of individual volunteer values and those of the organisation may be key to enhance engagement. K.F explained how;

“The Irish Wildlife Trust has a very clear main goal and value which is protection and restoration of nature, and engaging people with nature.”

Reflecting on the observations, the researcher witnessed clear alignment of this value with all volunteers in attendance at Bloom. While varying levels of expertise were present across the volunteer cohort, it was clear that a shared love of nature and desire to see it protected contributed towards these individuals' desire to assist the IWT. V5, while explaining their role as a volunteer, told the researcher;

“My goal is basically to try and talk to members of the public, to let them know about who the Irish Wildlife Trust are, and to try engage in some conversation in environmental, biodiversity, nature related matters.”

These interview quotes indicate that the IWTs primary value, the aim to protect nature and engage the public with conservation, is a guiding principle shared by volunteers, the presence of such value-alignment denoting cohesion between volunteer and organisational values.

4.3.2.2 Volunteer perspectives on value alignment

Although values are distinct from identities and motivations, they play into their creation and maintenance. Values directly influence motivation, as they are the general beliefs which underpin why individual’s act in a certain manner (Parks & Guay, 2009). Consequently, understanding IWT volunteer perspectives of value alignment may be crucial to understanding how personal beliefs impact motivation, in turn influencing volunteer engagement and retention. From V2’s perspective, among the volunteers they have interacted with at the IWT, they perceived a high level of organisation-volunteer value alignment, telling the researcher;

"In terms of structure of the organisation, yes, I think it does allow for any values of the volunteers that I know, including myself, to be able to volunteer feeling that you are operating within what you would like to be doing."

While operating as participant-as-observer at Bloom, the researcher observed such an expression of a volunteer operating within a voluntary role, simultaneously having the autonomy to organise an activity which they planned, to engage with the public through the IWT. This volunteer was able to express their shared value, love of and enthusiasm for nature, by organising a snail race at the IWT public outreach stand. Staff of the IWT did not pressure the volunteer, merely allowing this individual to express their love of nature through volunteering. This observation ties in with what V2 explained about volunteers operating within the organisational structure of the IWT, by doing what they enjoy, indicating strong value alignment. The opportunity for volunteers to express their love for nature through volunteering at the IWT indicates clear value alignment, positively influencing their engagement. However, there were instances where volunteers felt their values to not entirely align with those of the organisation.

Understanding the ways values can influence motivation can be useful for organisations seeking to improve commitment toward achieving their goals, and aligning individual values with such goals may lead to improved performance (Parks & Guay, 2009). Consequently, the IWT must account for instances where volunteers perceive misalignment between their individual values and decisions made by the organisation, if engagement is to be enhanced. V5 explained to the researcher how they came to terms with a situation where their values were not aligned with an IWT decision, to attend an event for Native Species Week, held at Dublin Zoo, telling the researcher;

"I was a bit dubious and I have ethical problems or ethical issues about zoos in general. So I was a bit surprised that the Irish Wildlife Trust would attend the zoo. I know what they were attending was trying to promote native species, so I get that. But I wasn't sure if it was the right thing to do. But I still volunteered, so I overcame my reservations."

The presence of instances where volunteers perceive a value misalignment, even in cases such as V5's, where they overcame their reservations to assist the IWT, highlights the complex nature of maintaining volunteer engagement. Understanding cases of value misalignment and ensuring opportunities for two-way dialogue between volunteers and the organisation may be useful for the IWT, strengthening ties within the volunteer base, allowing co-creation of strategies to overcome such issues, and mitigating risks of diminishing engagement.

4.4 Theme 3: Recruitment, Retention and Barriers to Volunteering

The third theme explores practical issues the IWT must confront while seeking to attract and subsequently retain volunteers, while also addressing barriers which may limit ongoing engagement. 'Volunteer Recruitment, Retention and Capacity Issues' delves into organisational limitations, such as staff capacity and informal recruitment mechanisms and the impact of both. 'Barriers to Volunteering', meanwhile, addresses logistical, personal and organisational instances which may hinder individuals abilities to attain volunteer opportunities. Insights derived from theme 3 point to key areas for improvement which may support accessible opportunities for volunteering.

4.4.1 Sub-Theme 1: Volunteer Recruitment, Retention and Capacity Issues

4.4.1.1 Introduction

This sub-theme addresses the measures employed by the IWT in the initial recruitment and subsequent retention phases of the volunteering process within the organisation, aiming to identify aspects of these processes which may be improved. For the IWT, the ability to recruit enough volunteers to continuously support the efforts of the organisation is key, and ensuring their continued involvement once onboarded is a key component of engagement. How the IWT approach recruitment and retention is thus necessary to understand to answer the primary research question, as these organisational practices are directly relevant to volunteer involvement and satisfaction, while simultaneously relevant to sub-question 1, 3 and 4.

4.4.1.2 Staff Perceptions on Volunteer Recruitment

Analysis of IWT staff interviews led to an understanding that the IWTs current approach to volunteer recruitment is reactive to individual initiative, with prospective volunteers making initial contact with the organisation. K.F explained how;

"Volunteers really regularly approach the Irish Wildlife Trust and seek to volunteer and that one is probably the main way of people becoming volunteers. But most people that, because of capacity issues, most people who do that, don't succeed in getting voluntary positions."

This statement raises two important issues. First, the lack of a structured, proactive approach to volunteer recruitment at the IWT. Second, potential interest in volunteering at the IWT overwhelms current organisational capacity to allow for expressions of volunteerism at the organisation. While a passive approach to recruitment may suffice within the current capacity of the IWT, should in future the IWT seek to expand their use of volunteers, this approach may not be adequately scalable, potentially hindering engagement. This aligns with issues identified in efforts to enhance volunteerism described in the literature, as the importance of structural adaptations to accommodate varying forms of volunteer involvement are seen as key to organisational success (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003). In the absence of a shift towards formalised recruitment, the IWT may face issues if seeking to convert interest in volunteering to active engagement.

Other challenges faced by the IWT in terms of volunteer recruitment as indicated by staff of the organisation include the geographical proximity of individuals seeking to volunteer to locations the IWT are currently active, with distance from opportunities to volunteer noted as hindering recruitment. The IWT is a membership based organisation with its head office in Dublin, simultaneously operating a network of branches in various parts of Ireland. These branches operate at varying activity levels. Staff note that currently, opportunities to be recruited as a volunteer may be limited depending on individuals location, with E.N explaining;

"If you weren't able to access Dublin… or if you don't live near like the other branches that are operating… then we just don't have opportunities for people there, simply because we just don't have people to run it."

This statement highlights that the IWTs ability to recruit volunteers is hindered by the varying levels of branch activity, proximity to head office in Dublin, and certain regions of Ireland not being serviced by branches. In regions devoid of an IWT branch, interested individuals may have no outlet for their desire to assist the organisation. Hence, potential volunteers may face exclusion from opportunities to participate in conservation advocacy through the IWT, not due to lack of motivation or interest, but as a result of physical location. To enhance volunteer engagement on a national level, minimising the physical distance to voluntary opportunities may be key to recruitment, either through expanding the current branch network or ensuring that current branches offer consistent opportunities.

4.4.1.3 Volunteer Perspectives on Recruitment

Staff perspectives highlighted geographical and capacity challenges faced within volunteer recruitment processes at the IWT. While important, this must be examined in conjunction with IWT volunteers perceptions of their own recruitment. This section outlines volunteer views on the ease, or lack thereof accessing volunteer opportunities at the organisation, and challenges faced throughout the process. Volunteer interviews revealed varying experiences related to individuals' experiences of being recruited to the IWT, with some volunteers taking the initiative to apply when prompted by the organisation. V5 explained that, as they were a member, a general email was sent to membership seeking expressions of interest in volunteering, which they in turn responded to. V5 recalled, post-response to the email;

"I remember Kieran spoke to me, and he rang me up after I said I would volunteer, and obviously he wants to know that I'm somewhat sane and can converse, and isn't going to be a total headbanger… I didn't find it difficult to volunteer."

This statement reflects that V5s experience of direct communication by email, and personal engagement, the phone call from staff, contributed to their sense that IWT recruitment was a

straightforward process. This reiterates the value of clear communication coming from the IWT in facilitating volunteer involvement, indicating the importance of good organisational communication in enhancing engagement. Other volunteers recall their recruitment to the IWT as a rather informal occurrence, V2 for example, began their volunteer journey because their husband was involved, telling the researcher;

“He started first, so I kind of went along with him, because it’s an area of interest for both of us anyway.”

V4 explained how;

“I went to one of the outings, you know, and then a woman there asked, ‘would you like to join?’, so I said ‘yeah, I’ll give it a go.”

These quotes indicate that informal, connection oriented routes to volunteering have been key factors in initial engagement at the IWT. For V2 and V4, social relationships and in person connections were important to their recruitment, demonstrating that informal approaches to recruitment can be effective in initially onboarding volunteers, such routes being natural, unforced recruitment mechanisms. That said, over-reliance on personal connections may lead to discrepancies in access to volunteer opportunities. As this research focuses on enhancing organisational practices to foster long term volunteer engagement, the above indicates that while personal recruitment strategies are in place, more structured recruitment could be beneficial to the IWT.

4.4.1.4 Volunteer Retention and Capacity Issues

While understanding the recruitment process, how volunteers initially became engaged at the IWT is important, explaining the factors at play in retaining volunteers within the organisation is key to fully answering the research questions. This section analyses how staff approach volunteer retainment, aiming to understand what elements may be improved, enhancing sustained engagement. The IWT provides individuals with opportunities to assist the organisation in their advocacy efforts, although maintaining this engagement poses numerous challenges, due to

constraints on staff time and lack of formalised retainment strategy. Efforts are indeed present within the organisation to retain volunteers, however, staff interviews indicated that these efforts are primarily of an informal nature. F.V explained;

“There is no written strategy, but what we prioritise is if we have an event we always ask, we will ask the same volunteers if they are available.”

In the absence of formal, standardised retention strategies, there exist explicit efforts to consistently engage what staff call the “core volunteers”, individuals who have proven to be consistent and effective. The informal nature of retention at the IWT was reiterated by K.F;

“There isn’t any sort of reward scheme or structured sort of way of making, of retaining volunteers other than ensuring to thank them for their inputs and also we would routinely contact the same body of volunteers for events throughout the year to build up a relationship and to keep yeah, keep the same group of volunteers coming back once, once we’ve gotten to know them, and know they’re capable of doing the load.”

Acknowledging volunteers for their efforts and establishing and maintaining relationships with them are thus key to the IWTs informal retention practices. This ties in with the literature on volunteer management, where the establishment of relationships is seen as key in maintaining a collective identification among volunteers, contributing to their sustained motivation and involvement (Omoto & Snyder, 2008). However, the lack of clearly outlined retention practices may limit the IWTs capacity to sustain volunteer engagement over time.

Limited staff capacity is a key barrier for the IWT in implementing a standardised retention protocol. At present the IWT has four full time staff, none of whom are primarily tasked with volunteer management. Consequently, planning for volunteer activities competes with staff time, schedules already busy with the organisation's primary advocacy work. F.V explained the challenges faced by staff, aiming to offer meaningful, long-term roles to volunteers;

“I think we need to improve the strategy to have, as I said, longer projects where people can always have something to do because its like one of the downsides of having volunteers is to have the person's time, and they have nothing to do, so yeah, it's the biggest challenge, you know? Proper plan in place to always keep the person occupied, because it's very, very valuable, you know, everybody’s time.”

This quote relates to an important point in the engagement literature, as clear objectives and skilled mediation, in conjunction with consistent, early integration of others perspectives leads to effective participation (Reed, 2008). As such, retaining volunteers long enough to reach this point is key, although potentially challenging in the absence of standardised retention mechanisms. While the IWT indeed value their volunteers and staff endeavor to consistently engage the “core volunteers”, limited staff capacity for volunteer management and the absence of formal retention strategies may hinder retention over time. The risk of volunteers leaving, or becoming disinterested due to lack of opportunities may be exacerbated by capacity limitations and lack of standardised retention mechanisms, these remaining key challenges.

4.4.2 Sub-Theme 2: Barriers to Volunteering

Key barriers which impede volunteer engagement at the IWT are identified within this sub-theme, including geographical proximity barriers, limited structured opportunities to assist, and lack of opportunities for younger demographics. To assess the impact of IWT organisational practices which contribute to volunteer involvement and satisfaction, understanding such barriers is essential. Consequently, this sub-theme is directly relevant to the primary research question. By examining volunteers' experiences with current IWT engagement practices, and their suggestions for improved participation, the sub-theme is highly relevant to sub-questions 3 and 4.

There exist numerous barriers to volunteer engagement, these being well documented in the literature. Volunteering requires time, effort and opportunity costs to individuals partaking. To volunteer can be to give up other social opportunities and activities in order to participate (Snyder & Omoto, 2008). Such barriers may impact an organisation's capacity to recruit and retain volunteers. From the volunteer interviews, several factors were mentioned as obstacles to

volunteering, including in cases where motivation is present. Geographical barriers, lack of continuous, structured opportunities, and minimal roles for younger generations all mentioned.

Although the IWT is a national organisation, geographic obstacles to volunteer opportunities emerged as a barrier, potentially limiting access to opportunities to assist the organisation. Despite several branches, of varying activity level, in operation around Ireland, many of the outreach and other events organised by the IWT occur in Dublin, where the central office is based. This was a perceived barrier to volunteers living outside of the capital. V5 explained;

“Everything is Dublin-centric and the Irish Wildlife Trust is no different in that. Do they go to any events anywhere else in the country? I know there's branches, but that's different. I don’t know if they actually go to other events around the country where there would be volunteering opportunities.”

This quote represents what may be construed as a structural constraint of the IWT, the centralised nature of IWT activities potentially limiting access to voluntary opportunities for otherwise motivated individuals living outside of Dublin. Volunteer managers must offer opportunities which make sufficient use of volunteer time, and should offer volunteer opportunities which not only benefit the organisation, but reduce the impact of such structural constraints (Gage & Thapa, 2012). Staff acknowledge that barriers to volunteering exist within the IWT. However, insufficient manpower to address these constraints is cited as a primary obstacle to furthering opportunities to volunteer in all parts of the country, K.F explaining;

“The main barrier will just be staff time and I think the staff members recognise the value of volunteers and the potential of volunteers to help us with our goals and work program, and there is even a sense of frustration at times that we don’t have enough time to do more volunteer recruitment, in person events.”

Staff acknowledge the challenge of coordinating volunteer involvement to sustain volunteer engagement and satisfaction. Constraints on their time being the primary barrier from a staff perspective, limiting opportunities to volunteer at the IWT.

Through analysis of volunteer interviews, challenges related to finding suitable volunteer roles emerged as a potential barrier. Although the organisation embraces individuals' expressions of interest in volunteering, there remains a lack of structured volunteer coordination, which leads to a lack of clarity as to roles and responsibilities for volunteers. V1 highlighted;

"I suppose they never look for volunteers really like, except if you're living in Dublin. Suppose they might like you to go in and do jobs in the office."

Comparably, V2 elaborated on the lack of structured opportunities:

"There's no fixed projects that people can do. If you go in and say 'I want to volunteer', it's like, 'well, what do you want to volunteer doing?'. There's no fixed volunteer coordinator who has a list of 10 or 5 areas that you can volunteer in."

These quotes reflect a sense among volunteers, which aligns with a point seen in the literature, that the focal point of volunteer involvement must broaden its scope beyond the focal organisation and further embrace the large array of stakeholders which make up the community (Brudney & Meijs, 2009).

An additional barrier to volunteering at the IWT emerging from the interviews was the lack of opportunities for children and adolescents to get involved, although the IWT does seek to engage young people in nature. As the researcher noted at Bloom, the volunteers and researcher offered copies of the IWT magazine to families and children, and there was also a volunteer organised snail race set up in order to engage children (and adults) with nature. However, V2 noted that opportunities for non-adults to participate beyond the surface level are limited;

"There's nothing for them, and actually, they're a cohort in Ireland that has energy and enthusiasm, still that kind of excitement of animals. They haven't lost it yet… there's a lot of stuff they could do, and I do think that like we had people at native species weekend looking to volunteer, but they were too young. They were too young, but only just."

This could be an aspect of their overall engagement strategy the IWT could seek to improve. Involving people at a young age may be vital, as concern for habitat loss and other social issues initially emerges in most people's lives during childhood (Chawla, 1999). Offering appropriate opportunities to young people may thus allow the IWT to utilise an underused, motivated demographic, with the potential for long-term retention.

The aforementioned barriers, geographic, structural and age, indicate that while desire to volunteer is present, such issues may negatively impact volunteer engagement. Several staff at the IWT proposed the potential solution of hiring new staff, specifically tasked with the likes of volunteer management and branch operations. In order to enhance volunteer engagement across the country and improve cohesion within the branch network, such a solution may be worth consideration.

4.5 Theme 4: Organisational Structure and Volunteer Management

The final theme of this analysis examines how IWT management practices and organisational structure contributes to volunteer engagement and effective participation. Sub-theme 1, 'Volunteer Support and Resources', focusses on volunteers perceptions of support, logistical and informational, provided by the IWT. The final sub-theme, 'Volunteer Management and Coordination', highlights the crucial nature of relationships between IWT staff and volunteers, examining weaknesses and strengths in communication, the role of organisational guidelines in enhancing engagement, and contributions to organisational cohesion. Theme 4 demonstrates how organisational capacity and structure contribute to the experience of volunteering at the IWT, enhancing its organisational achievement of conservation related goals.

4.5.1 Sub-Theme 1: Volunteer Support and Resources

An exploration of the role resource provision and organisational support play in enhancing volunteer engagement at the IWT is provided by this sub-theme. Through analysis of both staff and volunteer perceptions, coupled with observations from the field, it deals with how current engagement practices are perceived, directly relevant to sub-question 3. Meanwhile, it delves into the influence of support mechanisms on volunteer satisfaction and effectiveness, relevant to

sub-question 4. Through its analysis of IWT practices which either deepen or lessen continuous volunteer involvement, the sub-theme is vital to answering the primary research question.

The standard of support and resources provided to volunteers by the IWT is a key element of volunteer engagement. This sub-theme analyses how volunteers perceive the suitability of IWT support and resources, for enhancing their effectiveness and role-satisfaction. Staff perspectives and observations from the field are utilised to frame these perceptions within the broader context of eNGO volunteer management.

A major improvement in support and resources, as claimed by volunteers, has been advancements in provisions of preparatory materials prior to public-outreach events. V5 noted how this improvement allows volunteers a feeling of preparation and capability in their representation of the IWT to the public;

“There was a document created to see where it’s all, so it’s a bit more organised that way. Previously that was all, it was sort of up to you to know what was going on, you know, as in what campaigns they’re involved in, what’s going on politically with the Nature Restoration Law, but that was more formalised this year by a document actually sent out to us. So we’d be, we’d know what’s going on and singing off the same hymn sheet.”

The provision of such supports indicates an increasing awareness at the IWT of the necessity of equipping volunteers with relevant, up to date information prior to representing the IWT at outreach events. When volunteers are provided support from an organisation, they are likely to view it as a sign of effort on behalf of the organisation, contributing to the individual's perception of being respected, valued and appreciated (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2008). Thus, the continuous provision of such resources by the IWT to volunteers may be construed as a low-cost, high-impact measure, indicating to volunteers their value, in turn contributing to a sense of confidence and engagement with their work.

The previous lack of such supports, as highlighted by volunteers, indicated that in the absence of adequate informational resources, volunteers were deficient in assurance and clarity while volunteering at outreach events, as V2 explains;

“We are the warriors going on to the frontline and we were basically told, ‘sure just talk to them, you’ll be grand’. And they have guns.”

V2’s analogy expresses how volunteers, expected to engage the public on wide-ranging biodiversity related campaigns and IWT activities, felt vulnerable due to lack of preparatory resources. During the researcher’s time at Bloom, the information briefings provided to all volunteers were widely well regarded, giving a clear overview of the organisation's history, currently active IWT campaigns, and the primary goals of the organisation, giving volunteers confidence when explaining such facts to the public. Despite such improvements, there remained a sense among volunteers that the IWTs current limitations in staff capacity had a negative impact on the organisation's ability to continuously support their volunteers. V3 underscored a desire within the volunteer cohort for increased man-power to support the branch network;

“I think that we need to hire somebody that manages the branches and gets their hands around that, because it's too important… we need to have feet on the ground and the only way to do that is by the branches.”

V3’s point aligns with the desire among staff of the IWT for further human resource availability to support volunteers, with F.V telling the researcher:

“Another barrier to having better communication with volunteers would be a dedicated person for this role… someone who could be in touch or even like analysing opportunities to have the volunteers.”

At modern organisations making use of volunteers, success has been shown to correlate with the delivery of effective, professional quality services, which in turn play a key role in keeping volunteers involved (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003). As such, for the IWT to sustain volunteer

engagement, building on recent improvements in informatory support, they must seek to further formalise volunteer support efforts. To conclude, volunteer's have experienced positive advancements in support, especially in terms of information resources prior to outreach events. However, staff and volunteers recognise that increasing formalised support mechanisms, specifically via additional manpower, would be beneficial. Such a proposition may solve issues with support, currently limiting the IWTs ability to formalise volunteer support and resource provision, while lessening staff work-load, in turn furthering nation-wide engagement potential.

4.5.2 Sub-Theme 2: Volunteer Management and Coordination

The final sub-theme examines the impact of volunteer management and coordination on volunteer engagement, effectiveness and role satisfaction within the IWT. Through the examination of both critical and complementary volunteer perspectives, and an exploration of perceptions of current engagement practices and support structures, the sub-theme is key to answering sub-questions 3 and 4. Via identification of organisationally-led improvements which may further the IWTs capacity to engage wider society, while improving cohesion among volunteers, this sub-theme is crucial to answering the primary research question.

The successful management and coordination of volunteers is a crucial element of the IWTs overarching capacity to engage wider society, sustain an effective branch network, thus supporting overall organisational success. With many IWT activities- such as attendance of public outreach events- being clearly reliant on volunteer involvement, engaging and managing these individuals necessitates deliberate strategies. The final sub-theme examines the influence of coordination between IWT staff and the branch network, and how it contributes to volunteer satisfaction, engagement and organisational function.

The IWTs volunteer-led branches are key to the organisation's public engagement efforts, through consistently organizing events such as biodiversity walks, outreach events and educational talks. Nevertheless, volunteers' perceptions of the extent to which they feel supported vary. Certain volunteers highlighted the essential roles staff have played in facilitating the smooth running of branch led events, offering logistical support when required. For example, V4 recalled when staff provided assistance during a branch event;

“When we were doing the Green Drinks we were never stuck, we could ask Noel or Kieran Flood, like that if… Somebody say pulled out of a Green Drink talk, we’d have back up in the background from the head office, so they’re very good that way, yeah.”

Responsive coordination from staff is thus seen to enhance trust within the volunteer base, ensuring that unforeseen problems do not impact branch organised public engagement events. This indicates consistency with the volunteer management literature, when volunteers gain a sense of being respected by the organisation as a result of organisational support, it contributes to psychological engagement (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2007). Such consistencies highlight the vital nature of organisational management and coordination structures in enhancing volunteer engagement.

Nonetheless, alongside positive experiences of coordination and management, there remain examples of volunteers' perceptions of the less structured coordinative and management dimensions of the IWT. Concerns were expressed by several volunteers regarding inconsistencies in communication between IWT central and the branch network, with limited communication guidelines and templates indicative of potentially hindering overall organisational messaging. As V3 noted;

“There isn’t a tied up communications between the branches and the head office and so it seems very piecemeal, and I’ve just signed up to like the Limerick branch, the different branch emails, so I see the different communications that go on between them.”

Beyond simply tone and aesthetics, the lack of consistency within the communication strategy of the IWT can lead to uncertainty among volunteers, as V3 elaborated:

“Huge, yeah, like even the tone of voice, look and feel of the emails, and it’s not the branch's fault. It’s because we haven’t given them, ‘this is a template you can use, this is how you do it’,... We haven’t given them a code, or guidance as to what you say, what you don’t say, and it’s not to put rules on people. It’s just to give them guidance, you know?”

This quote ties back to the literature on enhancing organisational commitment in volunteer involved organisations. The importance of organisational assistance which specifically impacts task performance, task-oriented support, communicates clearly to volunteers that the organisation values their input (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2008). From a staff perspective, awareness of these issues is present, yet they remain challenging to address due to aforementioned capacity issues. In the absence of sustained attempts to increase volunteer recruitment and utilisation by paid staff, E.N acknowledges that the branch network remain active in this domain;

"I think it's always open, but again, I think it's more likely that it's the branches that would be bringing on volunteers for stuff, or they'll be finding volunteers who run events for them because they operate independently, generally, of the central team."

This quote emphasises the decentralised nature of the IWTs volunteer network, with branches independently managing much of the volunteer recruitment and event organisation within the organisation. Such decentralised management points to the significance of proper internal coordination apparatus, in the absence of which, branches may be overly reliant on autonomous initiative, resulting in potentially inconsistent experiences of volunteering at the IWT.

To summarise, although the branch network of the IWT exhibits noteworthy autonomy, through volunteer-led organisation, proficient management and coordination by staff is vital for such a models' efficacy. To strengthen organisational capacity to engage the public and achieve its goals of protecting Irish biodiversity, addressing present gaps in communication and investment in resources allocated to volunteer management may be crucial to enhancing cohesion within the IWT, simultaneously furthering volunteer satisfaction.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Answering the Sub-Questions

This research investigated the organisational context within which volunteerism occurs, at an eNGO setting, the Irish Wildlife Trust. This Irish eNGO consistently employs the involvement of a dispersed volunteer network, which assists the organisation with a broad range of activities. This thesis explored current IWT organisational practices utilised to engage the volunteer cohort, individual characteristics within personal decisions to assist, volunteer perceptions of engagement tactics and the influence of support on engagement. Furthermore, it contributes practical knowledge regarding effective volunteer management methods applicable to volunteer involved organisations. To achieve this, a qualitative approach was applied, in the form of participant observations and semi-structured interviews. 9 people were interviewed, four staff, the entirety of the organisation's full-time employees, and 5 volunteers, including a board member, chair of a local branch and public outreach and administrative task volunteers. This chapter outlines the conclusions of this research, discusses these in relation to the literature, and reflects on the research process. To begin, the primary research questions, and sub-questions foundational to this thesis are answered. The primary research question was:

“What are the essential elements which influence volunteer engagement at the Irish Wildlife Trust, and what may be improved, to enhance volunteer involvement and satisfaction?”

The subsequent sections will address the sub-questions, answers to which are necessary to answer the above primary question. Once complete, reflections on the research process and limitations of the research are discussed.

5.1.1 Sub-Question 1

This section delves into the extent to which current IWT engagement practices are perceived by staff to impact volunteer involvement, answering the question:

"From an IWT staff perspective, to what extent do the current engagement strategies of the organisation, such as recruitment, support systems and community outreach, influence volunteer involvement?"

Within the literature, it is clear that organisational strategies related to support, recruitment and meaningful participatory practices play a prominent role in enhancing volunteer engagement within an eNGO context (Hustinx et al., 2010; Measham & Barnett, 2008). The research findings validate IWT use of multiple such strategies within their engagement efforts, all of which to varying extents influence volunteer involvement.

From an IWT staff perspective, current IWT engagement practices significantly shape volunteer involvement, although not devoid of issues. Staff interviews highlighted the informal nature of volunteer recruitment and frequent reliance on volunteer initial contact, which was viewed as sufficient in attracting proficient numbers of value-aligned volunteers to the organisation. Albeit, time and resource limitations were cited as reasons such efforts were not as widespread or strategic as possible. Theoretical perspectives note the value of early, consistent efforts for representation and inclusive participation in effective environmental initiatives (Reed, 2008; Rowe & Frewer, 2004), with staff echoing this by noting the potential benefits of increasingly structured pathways to volunteering at the organisation.

Mechanisms for continuous support of volunteers, while influential in maintaining involvement, were noted as improvable upon. A lack of formalised communicative and support strategies were viewed as potential hindrances to engagement by staff, although volunteers are generally perceived as motivated to assist. Participatory processes which facilitate learning and trust can strengthen stakeholder involvement (de Vente et al., 2016), yet such processes are not currently fully integrated into volunteer management practices at the IWT. Multiple staff members noted a need for further developed management practices, and increasingly clear communication channels, both potentially relevant to sustaining commitment and empowering volunteers.

The community outreach dimension is viewed as a primary IWT strength in an engagement context, specifically its ability to spread awareness of challenges facing Irish biodiversity. With

optimistic narratives and tangible impact being key to maintaining environmental engagement (McAfee et al., 2019), Volunteer involvement at IWT led public-facing events allow individuals to partake in collective-efforts with clear objectives, thus sustaining involvement. Albeit, staff recognise that outreach capacity is varied within the branch network, with several branches such as Dublin and Limerick offering an active program of events, while others, like Galway, struggle to maintain an active program. To conclude, current engagement strategies employed by the IWT are viewed mainly as effective, yet there remains consensus among staff that increasingly structured recruitment, community engagement and internal support could further enhance volunteer involvement. Applicable recommendations include standardising volunteer support protocols and developing guidelines for maintaining branch activity based on successful operations.

5.1.2 Sub-Question 2

This section addresses factors identified by volunteers as key to their engagement, with a particular focus on the individual characteristics of volunteers. It answers the question:

> *"What determining factors, including individual characteristics such as identities, motivations and values, do IWT volunteers view as significant to their engagement with the organisation?"*

Volunteer interviews revealed that individual identity, intrinsic and (to a lesser extent) extrinsic motivation, and organisation-volunteer value alignment were as confirmed as key determinants of engagement with the IWT. Multiple volunteers identified a life-long love of nature and expressed desire to proactively contribute to its protection, viewing their engagement with the IWT as a means to act upon their personal identities. This aligns with both SIT and IT, as individuals were shown to reflect upon their self-concept, specifying, identifying and categorising themselves within their chosen social realities (Stets & Burke, 2000).

Volunteers frequently highlighted the likes of sense of place, emotional connections to nature, affinity for wildlife, social opportunities and potential career benefits as key motivational influences within their decisions to volunteer. Intrinsic motivations, described as the internal,

organic propensity to engage with one's passions, while exercising personal capabilities and through doing so, finding and achieving optimal challenges (Deci & Ryan, 1985), were clearly present across the volunteer base, and viewed as significant to their engagement by most. Meanwhile, as a consequence of volunteers' identification with the likes of social opportunities arising from volunteering, and a desire to attain board experience, extrinsic motivation, which relates to involvement due to a desire to achieve a separable outcome (Ryan & Deci, 2000), was simultaneously significant to engagement.

In terms of values, volunteers consistently identified a strong desire to see nature protected as a key driver of engagement with the IWT. This aligns with theories of values, which view them as guiding principles within individual decisions to act, influencing their behaviours and preferences over time and across situations (Sagiv et al., 2017). Personal values related to wanting to see nature protected were identified as key across all volunteer interviews, and organisational-individual value alignment can be viewed as significant to volunteers' engagement with the IWT, contributing to sustaining commitment. The recommendation derived from this is to highlight the opportunity to express value of nature and environmental identity through collective identification with organisational mission, while expressing opportunities to create tangible change within IWT volunteer recruitment and retention efforts.

5.1.3 Sub-Question 3

An exploration of volunteer evaluations of current IWT engagement practices, and their perspectives on potential improvements are to follow. This section answers the question:

> *"How do IWT volunteers assess the current engagement practices of the organisation, and what improvements to enhance their involvement, satisfaction and ability to contribute to the organisation do they suggest?"*

Volunteer assessment of the IWTs current approach to engagement contained a combination of critique and appreciation, highlighting both the need for improved organisational support and value of autonomy. The IWT branch network was identified as a central pillar of the IWTs overall public engagement capacity, with activities such as public outreach events and

biodiversity walks viewed as key in enabling beneficial community connections. Within the literature, participatory approaches which are locally led have been highlighted as opportunities to enhance bilateral learning and sustained engagement (Byg et al., 2017; Kidd et al., 2019).

Critical reflection of IWT engagement practices centred around communication and consistent messaging, V3 highlighting the inconsistencies in communication across the branch network, explaining how a lack of guidelines and templates exacerbate these issues. Such concerns tie into problems identified in the literature, which highlight how effective participation requires structured, clear communication and organisation-wide shared understanding (Reed, 2008; Gaventa & Barrett, 2012). In the absence of such coordination, volunteers may experience diminished cohesion within the IWT, and increased confusion.

Positive experiences of engagement practices at the IWT were nonetheless noted by volunteers, such as V4 recalling time-sensitive staff assistance at a volunteer run event, which mitigated the impact of an unforeseen challenge. Instances of coordination are thus viewed by volunteers as increasing role satisfaction and trust. This aligns with research on organisational engagement, which posits that effective management practices reinforce volunteers' sense of value within an organisation, enhancing psychological engagement (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2007).

Volunteers suggested multiple improvements, including further clarity within organisational volunteer communication protocols, guidelines for effective branch outreach and increased staff involvement in volunteer coordination. If applied, such suggestions could improve volunteer satisfaction, enhance organisational cohesion and expand the IWTs capacity to engage the wider public. As emphasised in the engagement literature, sustaining participation necessitates the use of accessible organisational assistance and inclusive coordination endeavours (McAfee et al., 2021; Boezeman & Ellemers, 2008). For the IWT to continuously benefit from its active and somewhat autonomous volunteer network, applicable recommendations include addressing communication gaps, ensuring participatory organisational decision making where possible and offering increasingly tangible efforts to engage volunteers are suggested, if organisational engagement outcomes are to be achieved.

5.1.4 Sub-Question 4

This section addresses volunteer perceptions of IWT support and resource provision, examining the extent to which these mechanisms influence their overall experience within the organisation. It answers the final sub-question:

> *"How are the supports and resources provided by the IWT perceived by their volunteers, and to what extent do these mechanisms influence their overall engagement and effectiveness within the organisation?"*

Volunteer perceptions of organisational and resource support provision is a key component for understanding volunteer engagement within eNGO contexts like the IWT. Even in non-resource-intensive forms, organisational support plays a prominent part in producing perceptions of being valued and respected among volunteers. Such perceptions potentially proliferate commitment, self-assurance and desire to proactively participate in advocacy and outreach on behalf of an organisation (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2008).

IWT volunteers expressed generally positive sentiment regarding recent improvements in organisational support mechanisms, particularly the provision of preparatory informational supports prior to public outreach events. V5 exemplified such sentiment, denoting how such provisions enhanced their capacity for coordinated messaging, simultaneously increasing their awareness of IWT goals, campaigns and activities prior to an event;

"we'd know what's going on and singing off the same hymn sheet"

This shift toward information-provision, increasingly formalised recently, indicates an improved awareness within IWT management of the importance of a volunteer base being adequately equipped to represent the organisation effectively. As observed in the field at Bloom, such informational supports were widely well-regarded by volunteers, offering individuals a clear, succinct overview of the IWTs overarching campaigns, mission and political context, in turn enhancing a sense of purpose and preparedness among volunteers.

Indeed, such efforts may be viewed as in alignment with participatory principles, as processes which allow stakeholders to feel respected and informed can cultivate learning and trust, as are essential for sustained engagement (de Vente et al., 2016). In fact, volunteers viewed previous support efforts prior to public engagement events as insufficient, V2 offering a striking metaphor of their experience at prior events;

"We are the warriors going on to the front line and we were basically told, 'sure just talk to them, you'll be grand'. And they have guns."

This analogy reiterated the challenges volunteers face if underprepared, specifically in situations where the expectation is to engage the public with diverse policy issues and complex scientific topics, in the absence of formal guidance.

Broader capacity constraints at the IWT were consistently linked by both volunteers and staff to support limitations. An expansive approach to branch-level organisational support was suggested by V3:

"I think we need to hire somebody that manages the branches… it's too important."

Such sentiments were echoed by staff, F.V mentioning the lack of dedicated volunteer coordinator as a hindrance to enhancing engagement and communication. Human resource constraints which impact the development of standardised volunteer management protocols, hence limiting sustained support, are not uncommon in the eNGO domain (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003).

Generally, volunteers perceive recent IWT improvements in support as impactful, despite constraints. The provision of support offers volunteers a sense of organisational effort aimed at their benefit, indicating that even non-resource-intensive efforts in volunteer management practices may still attain tangible outcomes. This aligns with the volunteer management literature, as the professionalisation of volunteerism, through the likes of structured training and support, plays a pertinent part in maintaining volunteer involvement (Hustinx & Lammertyn,

2003). Practical recommendations include sustaining and expanding recent improvements in support, examining the potential of expanding the staff team, or decentralising volunteer coordination efforts, all potentially beneficial to the IWTs overall engagement endeavours, simultaneously increasing volunteer satisfaction.

In conclusion, recent years have seen improvements in support and resource provision within the IWT, especially in terms of outreach preparation, which are mainly viewed by volunteers as efficacious in contributing to volunteer engagement and confidence. Albeit, human resource limitations remain of detriment to organisational standardisation of support mechanisms. Mitigating such constraints via investing further in volunteer support may be key in expanding and sustaining IWT-network-wide involvement.

5.2 Answering the Primary Question

Finally, the primary research question of this thesis is to be addressed, which was;

“What are the essential elements which influence volunteer engagement at the Irish Wildlife Trust, and what may be improved in terms of organisational practices, to enhance volunteer involvement and satisfaction?”

The findings indicated that both individual characteristics and internal organisational practices play key roles in shaping volunteer engagement at the IWT. From an IWT organisational perspective, recruitment, communicative and support related strategies are prominent, although inconsistently solicited network-wide. Individually initiated contact was found frequently as the initial step to volunteer involvement, and although staff recognise that this approach has resulted in a largely value-aligned volunteer cohort, they acknowledge the potential enhancement of recruitment strategies through formalising the process. Increased investment in standardising recruitment procedures may improve accessibility, minimise over-reliance on individual initiative and broaden future volunteering demographic profiles.

To sustain volunteer participation, effective support systems are essential. Indeed, volunteers acknowledge recent advancements, notably in terms of the provision of informational materials

and preparatory briefings prior to public outreach events. However, standardised communication guidelines, organisational coordination and access to advice were frequently identified as ongoing gaps in this domain. Effective support was found to contribute to volunteers feeling prepared, organisational trust and cohesion. Ineffective support was seen to be associated with a lack of role clarity and diminished confidence in role-fulfilling capacity, particularly in roles requiring public interaction. Modest efforts aimed at increasing volunteer support were consistently positively perceived, with volunteers recognising the presence of organisational resource constraints. This indicates that focussed, outcome-oriented support enhancement, which are not necessarily resource intensive, such as outreach guidance and formal briefings, have the potential to enhance IWT volunteer engagement.

A major strength of the IWTs current engagement protocols lies in the branch-networks outreach endeavours, including the likes of biodiversity walks and nature talks. Such events allow volunteers the opportunity to directly engage with communities, concurrently actively engaging in efforts to assist the IWTs overall mission. Albeit, variations at branch-level in terms of capacity to consistently offer such volunteer-involved events is disparate, suggesting that further branch coordination and sustained branch support is required. Motivated volunteers in the absence of adequate organisational support may not necessarily lead to consistent results. Multiple staff and volunteers support the idea of introducing additional staff, with the role of overseeing volunteer management and branch coordination, such an addition potentially increasing consistency within voluntary experiences and enhancing branch coordination.

Individual identities, motivations and values can be stated as essential elements of volunteer engagement within the IWT. Among volunteers, a collective wish to see biodiversity preserved, frequently based upon long-term internal affinity with wildlife and ecosystems, were distinctly visible across all interviews. A keen interest in biodiversity and opportunities to proactively engage with such internal drivers, intrinsic motivations as such, were clearly relevant to all participants. Extrinsic motivations, such as social opportunities and career development, were simultaneously present as influences of engagement, although to a lesser extent. With volunteers indicating a preference for enhanced participatory access to IWT decision making, the findings

indicate the importance of an organisational climate which both capitalises upon and fosters such drivers of engagement.

In conclusion, a committed and capable volunteer network, united through agreement with organisational mission and collective purpose, is highly beneficial to the IWT. Nonetheless, if volunteer satisfaction and involvement are to be enhanced, organisational engagement mechanisms require further development. Increasing support initiatives, improving organisational communication and standardising volunteer recruitment and retention efforts could ensure consistency within the volunteering experience. To achieve this, meaningful participation, including across the branch network, is required. Although staff capacity constraints persist as a challenge, the findings point to the significance of gradual improvements, especially in coordinative and support contexts, as these can notably augment the success of volunteer engagement efforts at the organisation.

5.3 Recommendations for Future Research

This research delves deeply into the case of the IWT, aiming to understand how volunteers at this eNGOs reasons for volunteering could be used to improve the volunteer engagement strategies of the organisation. At present, there is a limited amount of literature on volunteerism in the Irish context, even more so within the eNGO and conservation sector. Future research could focus more broadly on volunteerism across the environmental and conservation sector in Ireland, perhaps using quantitative surveys to understand the forces at play behind individuals decisions to volunteer across numerous Irish eNGOs (Birdwatch Ireland, Irish Seed Savers, Crann, etc.), examining the key motivational forces at play within the volunteering processes across a range of eNGOs. This could give broader, more generalisable insights into what Irish eNGOs can do to improve volunteer recruitment, retention and role satisfaction.

5.4 Reflections on the Research Process

This thesis aimed to examine various factors influencing volunteer engagement within the IWT, by exploring organisational practices, volunteer characteristics (identities, motivations and values), and lived experiences within a volunteering context. The goal was to derive practical

recommendations which may enhance IWT volunteer engagement, which despite challenges faced, I believe to have achieved.

Having never conducted interviews prior to this, doing so involved learning-on-the-job. My semi-structured interview guides offered flexibility, although this meant slight discrepancies in questions asked across the sample, hence direct comparison of certain responses was challenging. The interview guides were informed by both my theoretical framework and literature review, however, in retrospect I believe that more questions regarding organisational supports and resources would have been beneficial.

Within the context of my internship, I worked 7 days across 4 outreach events alongside volunteers, the attendance of which offered me the opportunity to interact with and observe volunteers. Within my role as participant-as-observer, primarily at Bloom, I kept a diary of events as they unfolded. However, looking back, I realise that these notes could have been more analytically focussed toward my objectives.

My findings were not intended to be generalisable to all eNGOs, rather to examine the specific IWT context. Nevertheless, I believe my research design is traceable and reproducible, and hopefully my findings could be beneficial to other eNGOs.

On a personal note, this thesis has been a major challenge, representing my deepest immersion in any topic thus far. My expectation was that wildlife preservation was to be a key motivational influence among volunteers, although I hadn't anticipated calls for clearer communication and deeper participatory processes to be as influential. My conceptualisation of volunteer engagement expanded with each day in the field and each subsequent interview. Ideally, my findings can assist the IWT, contributing to enhancing volunteer engagement within the organisation. Volunteerism can play a prominent part in biodiversity conservation, and efforts to assure its efficacy and sustainability are vital in modern times.

7. References

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8. Appendix

8.1 Irish Wildlife Trust Staff Interview Guide

Specifications:

Research question: *How can the Irish Wildlife Trust improve their volunteer engagement strategies to better align them with their volunteers identities, motivations and values?*

Interviewer: Desmond Kenny (s1085634)

Duration: 45-60 minutes

Introduction:

This interview is part of my master thesis research project, for the Environment and Society Studies program at Radboud University, the Netherlands. I would like to thank you for your time, as it will be invaluable for my ability to answer the above research question. Is it okay if I record this discussion? Upon completion, I am required to upload my data to a university server. Only myself, my thesis supervisor Dr. Jennifer Telesca, myself and a third examiner will have access to the data. If you wish to remain anonymous, you do not need to give me your name. If this is okay, do I have your permission to begin recording?

Introductory Questions:

1. What is your name?
2. Could you tell me about your educational background?
3. What is your role within the Irish Wildlife Trust?
4. For how long have you held this position?
5. Have you volunteered in the past? If so, what motivated you to do so?

Engagement:

1. Could you explain which strategies the Irish Wildlife Trust currently employs in order to engage with your volunteers?

2. Regarding any events, activities or goals of the Irish Wildlife Trust, in what way does the organisation generally communicate with its volunteers?

Volunteers:

1. Does the Irish Wildlife Trust actively recruit or try to attract new volunteers?
2. If so, how does this process work?
3. Are there currently any strategies in place to retain those already volunteering with the Irish Wildlife Trust? If so, what are they?

Identities, Motivations and Values:

1. In relation to volunteers' identities, motivations and values, how well do you think the goals of the Irish Wildlife Trust align with these?
2. Has there been any effort on the part of the Irish Wildlife Trust to gather feedback from volunteers on the topic of their motivation to work with the organisation?
3. Based on your experience engaging with volunteers, do you feel there are any specific shared motivations or values that most Irish Wildlife Trust volunteers have?
4. Do you think the Irish WIldlife Trust effectively utilises such shared values or motivations in their engagement strategy? How so?

Communication:

1. Do you believe the current methods of communicating with volunteers are effective?
2. Could you explain these methods?
3. Are there any barriers or challenges you feel the Irish Wildlife Trust must overcome in order to effectively communicate with your volunteers?
4. What do you think are the most effective channels of communication (i.e website, email, magazine, post etc) in the Irish Wildlife Trust's efforts to engage their volunteers?
5. Are you aware of any efforts on the part of the Irish Wildlife Trust to gather feedback from volunteers as to their communication preferences?

Supporting Wildlife Volunteerism:

1. In the Irish Wildlife Trust's efforts to support their volunteers, what kinds of resources and support does the organisation provide?
2. Would you say these resources sufficiently support volunteers in fulfilling their roles? How so/ how not?

Challenges

1. Are there any specific challenges the Irish Wildlife Trust faces in their efforts to engage and retain their volunteers?
2. Can you think of any challenges that may arise from integrating volunteers identities, motivations and values into the Irish Wildlife Trusts engagement strategy?

Potential Improvements or Suggestions:

1. Do you foresee much change in the way the Irish Wildlife Trust communicates with its volunteers over the coming years?
2. What are some new strategies the Irish Wildlife Trust could employ in order to improve volunteer engagement within the organisation?
3. During your time with the Irish Wildlife Trust, could you mention some examples of successful events as a result of engaging with your volunteers?
4. Can you suggest any areas of potential improvement for the engagement strategy of the Irish Wildlife Trust for the upcoming years?

Conclusion:

If there is anything else you would like to add, or questions you have for me, please feel free to explain or ask me now. Otherwise, this interview is now complete. I would once again like to offer my most sincere thanks for your time. I would also like to assure you that this data will be handled with the utmost care.

8.2 Volunteer Interview Guide

Specifications:

Research Question: *"How can the Irish Wildlife Trust improve their volunteer engagement strategies to better align them with their volunteers identities, motivations and values?"*

Interviewer: Desmond Kenny (s1085634)

Duration: 45 minutes

Introduction:

Your participation in this interview is greatly appreciated. My name is Desmond and I am conducting this research for my master thesis, as part of the Environment and Society Studies program at Radboud University, the Netherlands, in line with a research internship at the Irish Wildlife Trust.

Your time spent answering these questions is of major importance to my aim of answering the research question, *"How can the Irish Wildlife Trust develop a citizen engagement strategy which aligns with the identities, values and preferred communication techniques of their volunteers, which contribute to their volunteers desire to work in biodiversity conservation?"*. The interview shall run for roughly 45 minutes, and will contain questions regarding your experience as a volunteer, what motivates you to do so, what challenges you have come across on your volunteer journey, your self-perception of identities and values, and your personal motivations as a volunteer.

Your contribution to this research, which is being conducted under the supervision of Dr Jennifer Telesca (Radboud University) and Kieran Flood (the Irish Wildlife Trust), is of enormous value to this project. I want to assure you that the data collected will be treated with the utmost respect and shall be analysed discreetly. I am required to upload the data to my university server, but rest-assured your identity shall not be reproduced in the final document, and the information uploaded shall only be accessible to myself, my supervisor and a third examiner.

As mentioned previously, your identity will not be revealed in the final report and your anonymity is assured. If at any point you wish to cease your involvement in this interview, let me know. Now, before I begin with the questions, do I have your consent to record this interview?

Introductory Questions:

1. Outside of your volunteering, what do you do? I.e employment, education, retiree
2. How long have you been involved in the above activity?
3. How long have you been working as a volunteer with the Irish Wildlife Trust?
4. How would you define your role as a volunteer?

Motivations:

1. When you initially decided to volunteer with the Irish Wildlife Trust, what was the catalyst for your decision?
2. Do you have any personal beliefs, or perhaps environmental values which influenced your decision to volunteer? If so, would you mind explaining them?
3. As you are volunteering for an NGO working to conserve biodiversity, is there a particular aspect of biodiversity that you feel is of particular importance?
4. If you do feel a sense of environmental values or identity, do you believe your volunteer work with the IWT reflects these values or identities?

Motivations:

1. Regarding your voluntary involvement in biodiversity conservation, do you have any personal goals or desires which drive these efforts?
2. Are there any specific habitats or species you would like to see protected? If so, have these specific habitats or species influenced your decision to volunteer? How so?
3. Would you say you experience a personal connection to nature, or that a sense of environmental identity has motivated your decision to volunteer?
4. Do you feel that the values of the Irish Wildlife Trust align with your own? If so, has this impacted your motivation to volunteer?

5. Do you feel your awareness of environmental issues has improved as a result of volunteering? If so, has this awareness contributed to your motivation to continue volunteering?

Barriers to Engagement:

1. Did you experience any obstacles or challenges when you first decided to volunteer with the Irish Wildlife Trust? If so, what were they and could you explain them?
2. Would you say there are any discrepancies between the values of the IWT and your own? If so, how do you work around these differences?
3. Regarding your experience of communication with the IWT, have you felt it to be adequate, or is it sometimes unclear or suboptimal?
4. Do you think there are any barriers that may discourage other potential volunteers from offering their time to the IWT?
5. In order to better engage with their volunteers, how would you say the IWT could improve its communication strategy?

Facilitators to Engagement

1. In your view, does the IWT effectively communicate with their volunteers regarding the activities and goals of the organisation?
2. In your role as a volunteer, do you feel the IWT provides enough support and resources to help you effectively operate in your role?
3. Have there been any situations where you have felt your own values have aligned with those of the IWT? Has this contributed to a sense of fulfilment in your efforts?
4. Have there been any practices or strategies on the part of the IWT that you feel have been facilitatory in your continued voluntary efforts?
5. With the goal of better supporting their volunteers, what measures do you think the IWT could implement to improve this support?

Organisational Commitment

1. Would you describe yourself as committed to the efforts of the IWT? If so/ not so could you please explain why?

2. In order for the IWT to keep volunteers like yourself engaged in their efforts, what factors do you think they should focus on to keep volunteers coming back to help?
3. Have there been any situations during your time as a volunteer that have enhanced your level of commitment to the IWT? If so, what happened?
4. Have there been any situations during your time as a volunteer that you feel have challenged or negatively impacted your commitment to the IWT? If so, what happened?

Conclusion:

Once again, I am sincerely grateful for your time and participation in this interview. The interview questions are now complete. Before I stop recording, if there is anything you would like to add, please feel free to do so.

This interview will be transcribed, although I would once again like to assure you that your identity is not at risk of being exposed. If you would like a copy of the transcript, or to see the final thesis upon completion, please let me know and it will be arranged.

Thank you again for your time.