



The benefit of outdoor environments for international migrants facing migratory stressors; an examination of social and nature-based factors

Kelvin Mui

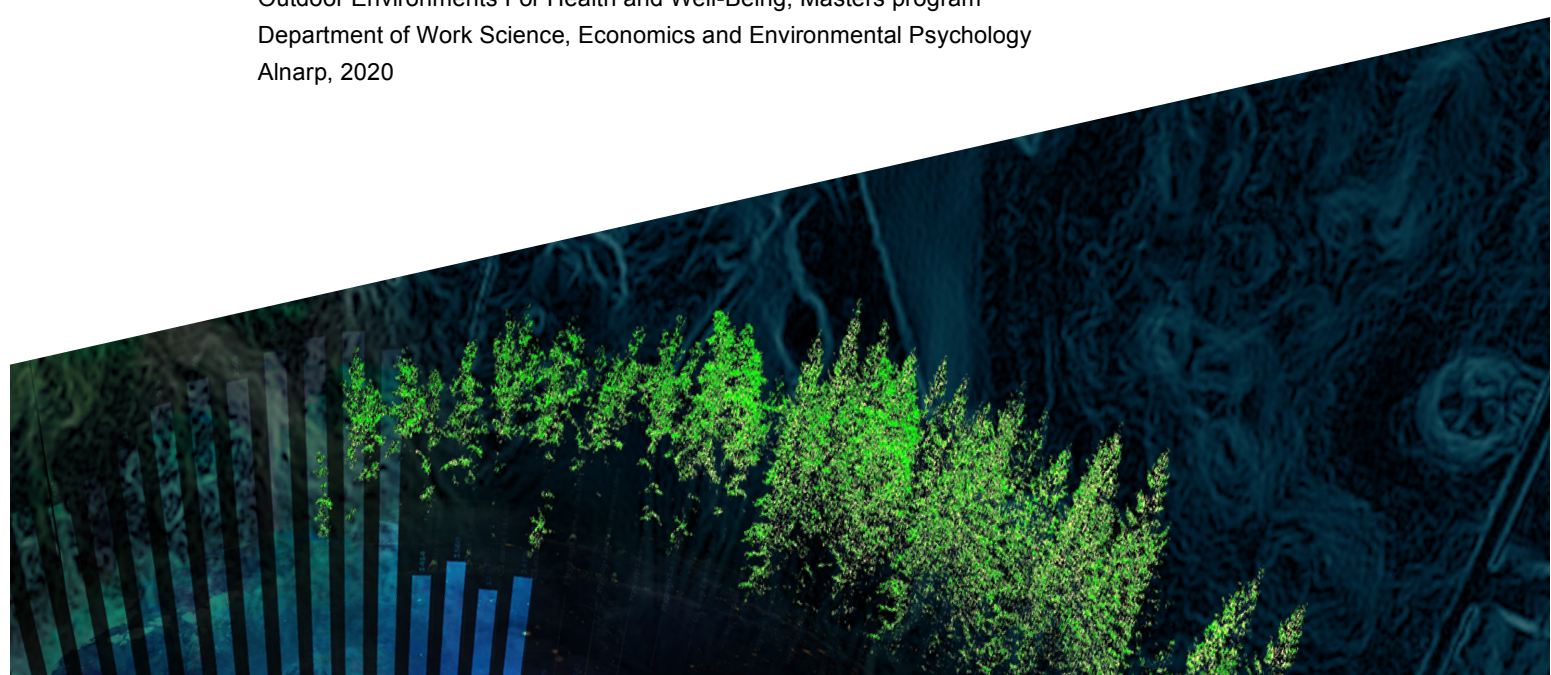
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The benefit of outdoor environments for international migrants facing migratory stressors; an examination of social and nature based factors

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Abstract

There is an undeniable trend in international migration around the world, and this has only steadily increased in recent years. Those that choose to move away from their home countries face great opportunities, as well as challenges and it is these challenges that can pose a threat to some. The complex mix of emotions and mental challenges experienced by these international migrants can cause a particular type of stress unique to those that must adapt to a new culture and language. How do different people experience this problem? What are the ways people choose to face these challenges? In this qualitative study, five subjects who have moved from their home country are interviewed about their experiences moving to a new country. The challenges they face are explored, as well as how they chose to meet those challenges. Four major themes are presented and analyzed in the results, then discussed in the context of relevant literature in the final section. Although some migrant challenges and coping mechanisms are supported by current literature, the use of the outdoor environment was especially important for the majority of the subjects. Furthermore, past experiences in childhood in natural environments may have contributed to continued extensive use in their adult lives, affecting even their preferred choice of residence. This paper exposes the sparse research in this important field of international migration and the potential use of the outdoor environment to help this growing body of people.

Keywords: Outdoor environment, health and well being, international migrants, cultural adaptation

Preface

This project is based on personal observation, thinking and research. The culmination of my own life experiences has led me to this project and I think there are many who can benefit from the information I have provided. The field of people and environment studies is broad and might be easily discounted, but the context of today's trends in migration, our current knowledge of health and well-being, and the importance of utilizing and recognizing the benefits of the outdoor environment cannot be overstated. This research project bridges these different fields and can truly bring a better understanding of the connections that exist in our lived experience. I hope that it will inspire others to continue the effort of this thought process.

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1. Introduction

Moving away from home, and one's own country is an increasing trend in modern times. Increased interest in other places due to vast sharing of information, increased opportunities as well as increased transportation links have helped to accelerate this phenomenon. The United Nations defines an international migrant as a person who is living in a country other than their birth, or other than their citizenship and in 2019, the number of international migrants reached approximately 272 million (United Nations, 2019). There are many types of migration that happen around the world, some voluntary, motivated by opportunities and others forced, due to wars or other drastic circumstances. The ever-increasing number of international migrants should signal its importance in the field of people and environment studies.

1.1. The problem of migratory stress

Studies in place attachment have shown that worldwide, the majority of people have an attachment to their place of residence (Lewicka 2013). Having these attachments to residences varies according to the strength of those bonds, affected by personal factors (individual and cultural) and place factors (social and physical) among others (Scannell & Gifford 2010). The effect of these bonds to a home country may exacerbate the challenges faced when a person migrates to another country, causing negative psychological outcomes (Scannell & Gifford 2014).

Skilled migrants, refugees, and other international migrants experience a particular challenge trying to adapt to the culture of the new host country. It can be viewed as a specific type of stress resulting from an individual's experiences with acculturation, or adapting to another culture. This stress can be intense both physiologically and mentally as it requires a person to adapt to an unfamiliar set of social and environmental conditions (Berry 2005). Although some attitudes towards these challenging experiences can be positive, many studies have looked at the negative health effects of living in a new country and culture. For example studies of the adjustment of international students moving to another country claim that feelings of uneasiness, insecurity and loss come from the challenges

they face (Yakunina et al. 2013). Poulakis et al. (2017) have discussed stressors stemming from international students' isolation from their families and from a lack of fluency of the language in the new country. Constantine et al. (2004) have reported that depression also has resulted from lack of language fluency in international students. Feelings of alienation and lack of belonging have resulted from discrimination for some immigrants to the United States, and of late, the interethnic and interracial tensions have turned to violence against minority groups (Stodolska et al. 2017). Negative feelings stemming from homesickness, alienation, frustration with an unfamiliar system and culture and the feeling of being different could lead to decreased mental and physical wellbeing. Subsequently, these could lead to an array of non-sustainable activities, such as use of medicines, substance abuse or excess consumerism to cope (Yakushko 2010).

1.2. Coping and adapting

The experience of stress, and ways to combat that stress through coping has been connected to major life challenges and changes (Lazarus & Folkman 1984). Individual factors through personal initiative and hardiness have been shown to be effective methods of coping (Yakunina et al. 2013). The use of social support networks has also been studied and provides positive results in decreasing stress when adapting to a new culture (Ra & Trusty 2017). Yashuko (2010) has grouped coping into a number of patterns such as; individual values, personal development, and help seeking, among others. Until only recently, very few of these studies have explored nature-based solutions as a way to contribute to the discussion on ways to help international migrants adapt.

1.3. A natural contribution

A nature-based approach involving a supportive outdoor environment is a type of therapy that has been growing in the field of research. Many researchers have been studying the positive effects of nature-based therapy for those suffering from various mental health problems. Ewert & Chang (2018) have found that both physiological and psychological stress levels have decreased for visitors to a natural environment. Hansmann et al. (2007) studied the effects of visiting an outdoor park and reported a significant reduction in headaches and stress levels in respondents, including an increase in feeling well balanced. Haluza et al. (2014)

have found that in a review of 17 journal articles, nature has a harmonizing effect especially on physiological stress reactions across many of the body's systems.

The concept of the outdoor environment as a way to rehabilitate and treat types of illness has been further theorized by Grahn et al. (2010) to show that at certain critical moments in a person's life, they are able to rehabilitate in natural outdoor settings as a way to cope with the stress and anxiety in their lives. Their 'scope of meaning/scope of action' theory suggests that the natural environment can be supportive to people at times when they feel weak and their everyday environments no longer seem to make sense. In times of extreme distress, the non-human environment offers more stability and simplicity, and the physical outdoor environment offers a place to help them to build back up again through restoration and rehabilitation.

The connection that humans have with nature has been theorized by E.O. Wilson in his hypothesis concerning the affections humans have with living things. He uses the term biophilia to refer to an innate tendency for us to seek connections with natural things (Wilson 1984). This connection provides the basis for an abundance of studies regarding humans and how they perceive, use and choose their natural environments.

The role of nature in providing relief to various psychological problems such as stress and anxiety, have been studied. Some notable theories cite the effect of the natural environment on the limited amount of directed attention that a person has. This restorative property of nature has been central to the Attention Restoration Theory (ART) proposed by Kaplan & Kaplan (1989) which states that nature provides restoration of attention capacities which are depleted by the directed attention that a person experiences through prolonged effort-driven activities. Although ART describes restoration from the effects of 'mental fatigue', Ulrich et al. (1991) explicitly propose that the restoration of mental fatigue is inadequate and should refer more to an individual's varying stress state, brought on by work or mental stressors. The Stress Reduction Theory (SRT) by Ulrich (1981, 1983) suggests that when people are exposed to a stressor, views of nature reduce the arousal greater than views in an urban setting. The benefit is greater when that individual is experiencing high levels of arousal and anxiety. Further, Ulrich et al. (1991) have stated that the feelings experienced by a person in a natural environment are adaptive and closely linked to cognition, the preceding emotional state of the individual, neurological activity and behaviour. This suggests that a person experiencing high levels of stress can adapt their behaviour and move to a restorative environment that supports rehabilitation-through cognition.

1.4. The aim of this paper

The research questions of this study are: How do international migrants use outdoor environments, especially to handle the challenges of moving to a new country? Does this use of the natural environment help them, and in what way? Where might this mechanism stem from, if it exists? In this study, five international migrants were interviewed about their experiences moving to a new country. An examination into how they experienced their journey from one country to another was undertaken. The data collected from these individuals explore the loss of familiarity with various aspects of the home country, the patterns of stress from major life-changing events, and subsequent coping mechanisms. Although some of the results align with current research into coping with the stress of acclimatizing to a new country, the use of nature and the outdoor environment is underrepresented in the literature. Specifically, there are few studies that link the use of outdoor environments as a way to manage the unique challenges of moving countries. Research in outdoor rehabilitation therapy for international migrants who have undergone forms of forced migration, is a related exception. In a literature review by Gentin et al. (2019), seven papers they reviewed showed that nature and natural environments are an important medium for integration, especially focusing on place attachment with the new country based on links to the former home-country's natural environment. Programs promoting the integration of migrants via nature-based activities have been ongoing in the Nordic countries for several years, and although the programs tend to be quite sporadic and lacking a clear systematic planning and delivery scheme (Pitkänen et al. 2017), there has been much interest in promoting their use. Since there is undeniable interest in this area of study, more research is needed and this study seeks to add to the literature in this field. Childhood experiences in nature in home countries resulting in continued use of outdoor environments in the new country, and later subsequent choices of residence are unique concepts derived from this study.

2. Methodology

2.1. Data Gathering and Participants

The data for this project was collected by performing qualitative interviews with five individuals who have moved from their home country. The selection criteria for these individuals were that they are native English speakers, that they have lived in another country other than the one where they were born for at least six months, and that they are adults aged between eighteen and sixty five years old. The individuals were found using the snowball sampling methodology (Lewis-Beck 2004), which involved using referrals from the author's expatriate friends and acquaintance domain. This method was chosen as a way to seek suitable subjects that fit the study criteria, and to ensure that each subject was available for a face-to-face interview in the area where the project was conducted. Each subject was contacted by exchanging mobile phone text messages, and the contact details were given by the person referring the contact.

2.2. Interviewing

The interviews were conducted in English and were originally planned to be in person. However, the Covid-19 outbreak made that impossible for all interviews so two of the five interviews had to be completed via video link. The interviews were all recorded, written consent was provided in a signed paper form and an interview guide was used for each interview to ensure consistency with each interview subject. The interview guide consisted of introductory information about the interview, and eleven open-ended questions were written and prepared. These questions were based on original ideas brainstormed at the beginning of this project. Follow-up questions were also prepared in case the subject did not elaborate enough on a question or theme, and some follow-up questions were spontaneous when there was an interesting direction taken during the interview.

2.3. Ethical Considerations

In this project report and during the interviews, I ensured both the research ethics and my own professional ethics met the requirements of good research practice (Swedish Research Council 2017). Since I have conducted qualitative interviews with human subjects, and have asked them personal questions that may be at times difficult for them, emotionally, I have informed them that their participation was voluntary and they could cease speaking about a topic if it become too difficult and that they could stop the interview at any time.

Regarding confidentiality and consent, I have ensured that the subjects provided written consent for the interview and the recording. Each subject's real names have been changed when named in this paper, so only pseudonyms have been used. Also, I have informed the subjects about the use of the material in this project and that they would maintain anonymity. Any personal information that I handle is kept strictly confidential. The handling of the recorded material is password protected on my personal computer and restricted to my own use during the writing of this project report. Through my own good time management, there has been enough time to complete this project such that misconduct has not occurred from rushed work. In addition, I have checked with my supervisor when I was unsure of some aspect related to ethics in this project.

2.4. Analysis

2.4.1. Overview

Inductive thematic analysis was used to analyze the data, chosen mostly for its simplicity and its clarity, using the six-phase approach as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Once all the data was collected, each interview was transcribed in full and initial ideas were noted to capture any spontaneous thoughts.

2.4.2. Coding

All the data was then coded by reviewing each transcript and finding unique descriptors, which appeared to represent some interesting aspect relevant to the research topic. I used a software program called TAMS Analyzer to facilitate organizing and managing the data, the codes and the coded extracts. The software program provided a user-friendly interface for managing the data, easily assigning and listing codes and coded extracts, summarizing codes and coded extracts and recalling which data set each extract come from, among many other useful database-related tasks. However, it did not generate anything automatically

without my own review of the content. I generated each of the codes by identifying some of the most common or similar ideas based on familiarity of the data via the interview itself, the process of transcription, and re-reading all the data. Codes were grouped together if they had a common thread and regrouped upon the second review of the coding. In the first round, 82 unique codes were generated after some merging and grouping, and five more were added in the second round of coding.

2.4.3. Themes

I distilled unique themes from these codes using a thematic mapping concept, which were then reviewed at two levels. The first level ensured that a theme worked for all of its associated coded extracts and formed a coherent pattern. There were initially 378 coded extracts reviewed at this first level and the thematic map yielded five themes. The second level of the reviewing phase involved evaluating the candidate themes across the entire data set to ensure each theme was unique and contained enough meaningful, supporting coded extracts. This was done on an excel spreadsheet displaying each candidate theme and each of its associated coded extracts. After doing so, it was determined that one of the themes should be dropped because there were not enough extracts and they lacked substance as a theme worth pursuing, leaving four main themes. These four themes are presented in a table in the results section of this report, and each theme and subtheme are discussed in greater detail below.

2.4.4. Thematic mapping process

The thematic mapping process involved listing all the codes, then grouping them on separate pages in different ways until they yielded some kind of pattern that could be articulated into a set of unique, coherent concepts or themes. These themes only became clear after reviewing and grouping the codes in many different ways and testing different candidate themes. Themes were initially given a preliminary sentence-long title, and were also given a longer descriptor for ease of evaluating whether or not a code fit that theme. The theme titles were then reworded in various ways to reach a unique, brief but succinct final version.

2.5. Methodological Considerations

Thematic analysis was the preferred method for this study, based on the perceived difficulty to obtain any meaningful quantitative data on this subject in the given timeframe. Although this author would have preferred to do some quantitative analysis, it was determined that collecting and especially analyzing the data would

be problematic, especially for a topic that is very specific to one's personal experiences. Simply put, enough was not known about the topic to construct enough meaningful questions that could be analyzed in a statistically concise way. Using qualitative methods, however, provided more opportunity to explore "lived experiences" and find within those data extracts meaningful interpretations that cannot easily be captured by numbers and logic.

Other limitations in this study worth discussing refer to the number of subjects interviewed, their gender and their home countries. The number of subjects was limited to only five, and a larger sample may have offered more data on which to contemplate. All five were women, all were native English speakers, and three of the five were originally from the same country. Although gender and country of origin were not the focus of this study, there may have been some influence from these factors. The specific questions that were asked to the subjects, and the resulting follow-up questions asked also have limitations. A lack of experience in interviews reveals that in review of the data, more directed, specific questions regarding the outdoor environment, and better follow up questions might have yielded more interesting results directly related to the research questions. Nevertheless, the result of this process has supplied some unique results and further research questions that may offer new areas of study.

As stated earlier, the interviews all should have been face-to-face, however two of the five interviews were done via video link. It is unclear whether this has influenced the quality of the data obtained. The snowballing method used to find research subjects may also have influenced the data collected. This method has some disadvantages such as a sampling bias, with little guarantee of representativeness and lack of control of the sampling method of the researcher (Explorable, 2020). Also, from the perspective of the analysis as discussed by Braun and Clarke (2006), a disadvantage of using thematic analysis is having too broad a range of things to say about the data, which may paralyze the researcher in deciding which themes to focus on. Regardless of this, much of the data formed coherent themes that were not driven necessarily by theoretical background, but by the data itself. For example, the first theme presented in the results section contains the most coded extracts from the data review. This theme concerns the many varied challenges facing international migrants when adapting to a new country. This is discussed in more detail in the section below.

3. Results

The results show that the subjects spoke mostly about various aspects of their lives in the country where they currently reside. However, they also described where they were from, what motivated them to move countries, and what challenges they faced when arriving in the new country. They provided many examples of how moving from their home country affected them, and they all had used some methods to face those challenges, many of them quite similar. Each of the subjects had something interesting to say about the outdoor environment and how it helped them, in varying degrees, in the new country. Finally, all subjects had very insightful and positive reflections when they thought about their lives in the new country. In the analysis of the data, four themes were discovered and are presented below; *multiple unique challenges, similar coping mechanisms, nature is important and acceptance and advancement*. These themes contain additional associated concepts, and these subthemes are presented alongside the themes in the table below. Data extracts highlighting each of the themes and subthemes are presented in this section.

Table 1- Themes and subthemes from the analysed data

Themes	Subthemes
Multiple unique challenges	<i>Longing for family and friends; Making new friends; Longing for the home country;</i>
Similar coping methods	<i>Activities performed with others; Activities performed individually</i>
Nature is important	<i>Experiencing nature can be uniquely personal; Outdoors and being in nature can be used as a form of therapy; Upbringing can influence use of natural environments in a new country; Feelings towards outdoor environments influence dwelling choices</i>
Acceptance and advancement	<i>New family and real friends; A greater sense of security; Evoking profound self-reflection</i>

3.1. Multiple Unique Challenges

The first theme that became clear throughout the data has the most number of extracts and codes, and they all point to the varied challenges facing those that have moved from their home countries. Many of these challenges are unique to leaving a home country, while some can be experienced by anyone who leaves their families to start their lives. Missing your family and friends, feeling lonely and trying to find a sense of belonging are ideas that can extend to anyone who has left home. However, these feelings can be exacerbated the further one is away from home, especially in a different country. Furthermore, the feelings of alienation due to cultural differences including the spoken language are most certainly unique to those who have moved to a different country. This can also lead to difficult choices and sacrifices that a person who moves countries needs to make. Each of these ideas has been extracted from the data and is described in more detail below.

3.1.1. Subtheme 1: Longing for family and friends

Being in another country in this case exacerbates the feeling of missing family and friends. Emma has lived in a country other than the one she was born, for over 32 years. In the extract below, she talks about missing her family and how it was more difficult when away from her own country:

That's so difficult and you don't realize that I think when you first move away and start living in another country that's not your own, when you're young- and this was certainly the case with me anyway, didn't really occur to me that I might miss my family.

Missing old friends can be common to anyone who has moved from home as well, but can be especially difficult when the new home is in a different country. Tea moved to multiple countries and eventually has settled in France. In the extract below, she talks about the difficulty with making friends abroad, which is a challenge unique to living in another country:

And particularly with France but it goes with the other.. I find in Scotland as well, expats tend to stick together because they are searching for friends whereas people who grew up here they have their own tight knit groups, they're not interested in opening their world to new people, they're full.

3.1.2. Subtheme 2: Making new friends

Making real friends in a new country is not something that is easily done, which can sometimes lead to loneliness. As in Emma's case, she talks about missing old friends and how hard it can be to make new friends:

And also, as you get older I think... you realize how much you miss some of your very good friends- perhaps friends that you've had since childhood that you've shared alot with - that was certainly my case, especially when here I was very lonely (pause).. yea.

Emma also talks about her struggle in more detail and how it made her feel. "So I did feel terribly lonely because I didn't really... for many years I didn't meet anybody I felt I had much in common with or who was prepared to make the effort to get to know me, or..."

Subsequently, Emma speaks about local women in the country that she has moved to.

They are quite.. reserved maybe and protective, they're not open, in, in general, I mean there are always exceptions but in general, they all know each other, most of them have their family and friends here, the family they've grown up with, eh, they have a system that they call a 'quadrilla', which basically means they are a completely closed circle of friends that they usually have from infancy, and its very unusual for anyone new, especially from

somebody outside as they call us, to be admitted in one of those closed circles, so that was something that I found very hard for many years...

Not being able to easily make meaningful, local new friends can be quite difficult for anyone. Furthermore, these thoughts about missing family and friends from a home country can also be intensified by cultural differences in the new country.

3.1.3. Subtheme 3: Longing for the home country

Cultural differences and familiar societal norms can make a person miss their home country and long for those familiar experiences. Bea had the following thoughts about those differences and how they can cause a longing:

Its just sort like, well I did this and I'm doing this and that's... neither here nor there, I mean its not like I'm dying for attention but its, its um, you know I just feel like there- back home there would be a lot more give and take, and it might just be the people and the friends and the family that I'm comfortable with, but here its, its, its different...

I do, I do miss that feeling of camaraderie like walking down the street and saying hi to people..you know, come on have a cup of coffee or something.. and, but here its like there's this kinda ..you know I've noticed people just walking down the street, they won't.. pay no mind, kinda breaks my heart a little because I'm just so used to...friendly, 'hey, how ya doin?' you know, stand in line say something to the person next to you because you are in a situation were.. I don't know, it's just different...

The movement away from a comfort zone of a home country leads to many different struggles, due to a sense of alienation arising from being in a new culture. Language is one of the major hurdles, but the other cultural differences can be seen in the subtleties unique to the new country. Here, Tea relates her experience of the language issue in France, having lived in more than four other countries:

...but I have to say, in contrast to the other countries France has been very difficult to make friends. I find them to be particularly unforgiving with their language, they would rather speak bad, your language than hear you speak bad in theirs. And so its very frustrating 'cus you don't get alot of practice because they won't, they have no patience for someone who does not speak correctly or well.

This feeling of not being able to speak the local language well can be a very important concept, especially for those that want to move to a new country.

3.1.4. Subtheme 4: Language Barrier

Language is an important aspect of culture, and if a person is not fluent in the host language, a feeling of being left out can arise which could lead to deeper negative feelings, such as depression. Although people from all walks of life can

experience feelings of loneliness, missing family and friends and a familiarity that has been ingrained since childhood, those who move countries experience a more profound hardship involving a change of culture. The language itself that people speak is different and can affect your very identity, as with Ella:

...other than my name because it was Laura (Basque pronunciation), Laura (English pronunciation), you can, it exists in both languages and cultures, but I'd grown up here where everyone had called me Laura (Basque pronunciation), so Laura (English pronunciation) was very foreign to me.

...and everyone called me Laura(English pronunciation) and it took me ages to actually recognize it as my name and so people would call for me and whatever and if I wasn't really tuned in, I wouldn't react. And people would get really angry at me.

It is in this particular challenge involving one's cultural identity that presents a struggle for international migrants unknown to those who remain in their home countries.

3.1.5. Subtheme 5: New stressors

This cultural and language struggle discussed above can also be seen as a major stressor in everyday life, and may be intensified depending on the country and type of work that a person is engaged in. A good example is Tea who moved to Guatemala for 13 months in order to work with vulnerable people and to uncover human trafficking operations. She wanted to remain there to continue to fight for the people she worked for, but had to make a choice, a sacrifice for the greater good of her children:

When I left Guatemala, one of the things that drove the PTSD was guilt of the feeling that I left them behind. And when I had my kids, I knew that I didn't want to raise them in that environment and I wanted to go back and help fight with them and help them struggle, but I didn't want to raise my children like that.

... and then I guess the reason that I'm not living there now and I have to say that I did love the place, but I wouldn't want to raise my kids in an environment where they're so separated from the local culture. And they would always be seen as the outsiders and of course the sexism you know what I mean, raising little girls is, is tough to re-transmit. Because even if you try to teach them at home, if they're bombarded with the idea that they are without worth...

Here, the challenge is at least three fold for Tea who had developed a serious stress disorder being in this country through her work, still wanting to help those people but seeing the needs of her children first, and not being able to negotiate the extreme cultural differences that she thinks will affect raising her children. The sacrifices that she made for her family superseded her desire to continue her work in that country. The extreme stress put on her in this situation is quite prominent from her perspective.

These extracts presented above were chosen as they demonstrate the typical examples faced by the interviewed migrants, with particular focus on various subthemes; longing for family and friends from home, making new friends, the cultural challenges, and new stressors. The next theme describes some of the methods that were used by the respondents to ease the hardships brought on by moving to a new country.

3.2. Similar coping methods

The results showed that it was clear all subjects had found ways to face and counteract the anxieties and tensions they experienced when they moved to a new country. Everyone mentioned their hobbies, some unique to the new country but also some that they brought from their previous ones. Some subjects discovered new hobbies such as cooking and volunteering to find meaning in their new surroundings. Other subjects said that they had used dance, reading, gardening and music therapy, which were used in their previous countries, to help in their new ones. These hobbies and tools that were used are described in the data as a way to feel better in the new country. After several iterative steps in the analysis, these methods are subdivided into two main subthemes: activities performed individually, and activities performed with others. These will each be described in turn below.

3.2.1. Subtheme1: Activities performed with others

Many of the ways each subject described facing the difficulties in their new countries involved activities, interactions with and thoughts about other people. This was procured through asking questions about hobbies and interests in their new environments, and by discovering the challenges they faced. All subjects described the importance and value of having social activities or interactions in the new country, and also how these interactions made them feel more accepted in the new country. For some, this involved cooking and baking, for others it meant volunteering and meeting for meals or socializing in general. Each extract below from the data illustrates the value each subject places on the various experiences of socialization in the new country, and how it made them feel.

Kaya moved from her home country a number of years ago to be with her partner whom she eventually married and started a family with. When asked about her hobbies and social activities that she currently engages in, she says the following:

I get together with friends for lunch when I can, get together with friends after school with the kids definitely, and on the weekends we have a bunch friends over to the house, to barbeque or have dinners or lunches or whatever so we have an active social life normally.

This extract shows that meeting friends alone, then with children only, and finally with the whole family are an important aspect for her of having an "active" social life. When she first moved to the new country, her experience was very positive, having found a group of friends rather quickly without having the benefit of family and dear friends nearby. Having no other friends and family at the outset of her move, she needed to rely on making friends and socializing with her husbands friends, which turned out to be quite fortuitous for her. Below, Kaya talks about when she first moved to Spain and how she was able to get into one of the closed circles of local friends, the "quadrilla", which made her transition in the new country quite smooth:

Some people say that its hard to get into the cuadrillas here, get into a group of friends, especially a native one (laughs) I hear that they don't do that, but I feel like I was pretty lucky at the first apartment that we lived in, one of our neighbours which is a good friend of mine, kind of let me into her group which also had another American from Chicago in it.

Having this new friend and a local social network has also helped her once she started a family in Spain:

...but I think that it was good and easier I think for me to adjust because she opened up and had that and after the kids, also having a group of good friends with the kids friends and our friends and so that has helped alot.

This type of 'social solution', of finding local friends in the new country, made a significant impact on all the subjects because they described those positive experiences as affirming and helpful in their new countries. This theme of using different ways to cope in the new country has this common thread of 'social solutions' throughout the analysis across all the data. Bea for example, who moved to France with her whole family found an alternative education group, "Pole 64", who would eventually help her son:

I think the Pole 64 group was...that was, that was exactly what I needed, you know. I eventually started volunteering there. I started helping out and teaching English and just going- I mean it was great fun, it was wild!

This group that she found was able to help her son and eventually by volunteering and interacting socially with them it also helped her by giving her some aspect of acceptance and belonging. Bea talks about going on a school trip with this alternative group of educators:

And then the teachers were having a beer and barbeque kind of thing on this school trip. Its like you NEVER see that back home in the United States, so... I think just falling in with this group of people that were like-minded in that way, like I fit right in.

Bea expresses a clear positive social experience with this group that she found to help her son: "for us, it was, we met a wonderful community of like-minded people." So volunteering with this group brought positive feelings, such as feeling accepted and finding something in common.

Ella on the other hand experienced a different catalyst, as she moved by herself to Ireland, in a community where she lived with many different people. During this time, she really discovered the shared responsibility of cooking and baking for the community as both a hobby, and something that helped her:

And so that's really where I started to really hone these hobbies that I've kept up, like the cooking and baking and.. because I- during the winter, I also worked in the bakery 'cus there was less work to do on the farm but more need for the bakery, so ya, that's were I started to learn to bake bread and things like that. So ya, that's really.. it kind of opened up alot of things for me.

Meeting together socially with the other coworkers was also a very important aspect of living in this new country and in this community, the first ones that she had moved to on her own. Through socializing with them, and the activity of cooking Ella was able to enjoy the company of peers from around the world and represent her cultural identity through food:

And we would sometimes have a barbeque party and people would, because we were from all over the world, sometimes someone would say well, I actually really want to cook this from my home country and I'm going to cook for everyone and so we would have this big dinner and we would have like Brazilian food, and Korean food, Spanish food and just, ya! So, and that was really nice, that's really where I really got into cooking...

...as well because part of my job was to cook for the household, but then also this sharing food and part of sharing that food was also sharing our culture and our differences in a way but kind of celebrating them.

This positive social experience for Ella was not limited to food, she also relates how dancing helped her. Dancing can be an individual activity, but it also serves a very important role as a way to connect people, socially. When Ella was in Scotland she went to dance classes outside the community she was living in, where she met people that she did not work with or live with:

So it was brilliant and I loved it! And there I got to make friends that were outside of the community, so we talked about other things that weren't to do with special needs that weren't to do with the community and the politics in the community and all of that. And that really helped me...

So ya, that, I think that's where then the dancing became important and having that time away from being stuck in this bubble all the time because in a way my studies and my work and my living situation were all one. So I could never get away from it, except when I went dancing.

Getting away from being stuck in a bubble where people often find themselves is common in anyone's life. Socializing and being with others seems to be a way that people often employ to overcome that. In some cases the, 'bubble' could be feeling culturally uncomfortable. For example, Emma is now part of a social group formed around reading books in her native language, English. She now meets and socializes with local women in ways not available to her before. The type of interaction with this group provides a more culturally familiar way of conversing, which for her involves talking and listening to each other:

...and we love getting together and comparing opinions and actually, (pause) listening to each other which is something that I found people here often don't do. This is something else I found difficult here people all talk at you and at each other and get louder and louder and nobody listens to everybody else, they just say what they want to say while everybody else is saying what they want to say and apparently that's a conversation, but that to me is not a conversation.

The difficulty of adapting to a cultural norm that she was not used to has been described in the first theme, above. It is interesting that she mentions this difficulty after describing a social activity that she now engages in, which gives her happiness and familiarity. This group activity for her counteracts the feeling of cultural alienation and unfamiliarity, because she mentions the corresponding difficulty directly after describing the group.

The extracts presented above clearly describe benefits to the subjects through engaging in various social activities while in their new countries. All the subjects found these social-based activities beneficial and even necessary. The next section describes activities performed alone that each subject also found helpful.

3.2.2. Subtheme 2: Activities performed individually

This subtheme was conceived from the data because it contains a unique element of performing an activity or hobby that is primarily done individually rather than while interacting and socializing in a group. As a part of the main theme involving methods, activities and solutions that each subject took in their new country to feel better and adapt, this subtheme appears across the data.

In the first example, we hear from Emma again. Emma lived in a house with a garden when she was young. She moved away in her twenties to work in a new country, but did not have any plans to stay in that country long-term, so the jobs that she had were temporary as were the relationships. When she moved to Spain, she also thought that move was temporary but she met her husband there and eventually had two children with him. Now that she has a garden, she finds herself spending a lot of time there:

My main hobby I guess you could say is gardening- i'm very lucky here because I have a huge garden-well- to me is a huge garden, 1000m2 of south facing garden, so i'm usually either in the house or in the garden, cause my work is here and my main hobby is here.

She then talks about how important this activity is to her: "any spare energy I have I like to spend it gardening." In Emma's case, she had spent a long time waiting to be able to find a house with a garden in her new country. Unfortunately with the high cost of the house she feels some guilt that her family is bound to such an expensive property and garden, which is very important to her. She makes a point to describe it as more than just a preference to have it: "It is tremendously expensive, you know, the money you have to spend if you want anywhere decent to live, especially if you are like me, you NEED a garden..."

Tea talks about music therapy as something that helped her when living in another country while working on a very stressful project and feeling alienated. She says "music therapy helped alot..." and:

I had, I did music therapy, I would listen to, when it was really tough, I would listen to angry rock music and then, uh to calm down you know, more zen stuff and um, and then trying to- its hard because as an expat you're always an outsider and...

Now living in France, years later, she still uses music therapy accompanied by wine, but for a different purpose. Longing for things in a home country was discussed in the first theme, and Tea makes use of music, listening on her own, to achieve a release of repressed emotions, or a catharsis:

...but music therapy, you know every once and a while you get sad and you miss your home, so then I get my headphones while the kids are in bed I get my headphones on I get my glass of wine, start listening to my music, to just, you know I get into the catharsis.

Reading was also a popular hobby as four of the five subjects liked to read and two of them also found a renewed interest in the country they moved to. Bea mentions how much more she likes reading in the country she has moved to, France:

I was never a real good reader but now I just really (snaps fingers twice), you know I've been eating alot of books. And Kindle is a different kind of format but I just like, sometimes when I look at a book, and I go oh, I got that many pages, but I just go right through it.

Emma also talks about her interest in books as an individual activity that she has had with her for a long time: "I've always been passionate about books I guess I tend to escape a bit into books as well, it is an escape, here its very much an escape alot of the time... but that's always been a big passion." In Emma's case, she took reading as an individual escape activity and expanded it to a social activity by forming a book club. As mentioned above, this book club is a social

group of local women that meet to discuss an English book that all are assigned to read: "yea reading is a big thing and actually through reading, I've gotten to know more people here, made friends with Basque people here, well particularly Basque women because that is something that I found very difficult."

Another notable popular activity performed alone by some of the subjects included some form of being in nature. This type of individual activity is performed in an outdoor environment, which is a theme in itself, as described further below.

3.3. Nature is important

The previous theme presented various ways the subjects used to feel better adapted with their surroundings in a new country. These involved activities engaged with others to meet for meals, to socialize or just to be with others as though volunteering. Being alone and doing things individually was a second subtheme of that, which described how some activities and environments were used to acclimatize in the new country without others. This next theme explores frequent descriptions of being outdoors and in nature, both alone and with others as an important aspect of adapting to a new country.

3.3.1. Subtheme 1: Experiencing nature can be uniquely personal

The results show that performing various activities individually, especially in nature, can be a way to cope with moving to a new country. These activities involved walking on outdoor paths, hiking up hills and mountains and even surfing in the sea. This type of activity combines the aspect of forgoing socialization and experiencing some aspect of nature, outside the cities and towns where we commonly find ourselves. Bea describes the happiness of taking her dogs to the beach in France: "I like to try to walk as much as I can with the dogs on the beach if the weather permits, that's just a real pure joy because I love watching my dogs run, they're just athletes..."

Kaya describes her current activities, getting out by herself when her kids are at school and her husband is at work to walk in nature: "Yes, yoga and also walking and hiking, the other morning when I can or whatever, I.. to escape and go hiking walking running, by myself in nature."

Ella discovered the activity of walking alone in nature, first in Ireland where she first moved away when she was 18. She describes it as a meditation habit originally that allowed her to be in silence by herself.

I got into the habit of often not actually leaving the farm that much. I would walk along the lanes. The place where we were it was just, it was hills and all just farms. And there were just these lanes, tiny narrow roads where like a tractor would drive by once every few days.

...and I think that's where I started in a way, a kind of meditation habit. It wasn't necessarily sitting and ohmmm, but it was my time to just be by myself, be in silence and that's what I still do now. I still go off and walk and just walking along these country lanes surrounded by just fields and trees and seeing the birds and the animals that have walked by and that really became a habit at that point.

This walking habit has continued in similar forms when she moved to Japan, and when she moved back to her home country. She later describes how she was not able to get that kind of quiet nature walking when she moved to London for her master's program, and how she felt:

Ya I lived in London for two years and I found it very difficult not being able to do that, because there is even when you go to a park in London, its full of people and you can hear the traffic and there aren't that many animals and.. and its all very manicured gardens.

I found it really difficult not having that... just nature. That nature silence, which isn't silence, but it's a very different kind of sound. And ya, so that's become a big thing for me as a person and it started there in Ireland.

Surfing is also an activity usually performed alone in a wild uncontrolled environment. One of the subjects, Tea has been surfing for many years and describes the activity as incredibly important to her: "I surf, that's one of the reasons we live here, so I do that as often as I can... and then to get through the winter (laughs)." She then describes what it means for her to be out on the ocean:

...and I did love surfing from the first moment I tried it so, then ya that was it, I was gonna do it. I still love it, its still my favorite I still think that a bad day in the water is better than any other day.

Now, Tea has finally settled for the time being in France by the coast with her husband and two daughters. Here she describes how she has waited for this moment for a long time, reaffirming the importance of this individual activity for her:

After years of following my career, the heart of countries with zero coastline, (laughs) then I knew if I was gonna take a step back and be a mom that I wanted to finally, you know, to put my activities first, or to put surfing back into my life in a very real way.

She also describes how she plans to work this activity into her everyday life, highlighting it's importance: "and so I wanted to be able to live so close that before work I could run out, have a quick surf, run back and still get to work on time or get the kids to school."

The importance of the outdoor environment, and being in nature has been described in the above extracts as a very important personal way to engage in the benefits of this resource. The next subtheme describes another way this benefit functions and how it can be further explored.

3.3.2. Subtheme 2: Outdoors and being in nature can be used as a form of therapy

In the various extracts that follow, we can see that for some subjects like Emma, Tea and Ella, there is something particularly valuable about outdoor environments and being in nature. For them, it is something so helpful, important and affirming that it can only be described as a form of therapy. Emma for instance has a very strong attachment to her garden and spends much of her time there, as discussed above. She describes in more detail what it means to have a garden and be in it:

Yes its more than a hobby really, its almost therapy at times (laughs)... for me it helps me to pull everything into proportion because.. I tend to.. especially as I'm in the house alot, and on my own alot, I tend to turn things over and over in my mind and get things out of proportion and maybe start.. getting down about things or seeing them- or thinking about the future and seeing it in negative terms.. and if I possibly can that's when I need to get out and get into the garden because that stops all that and just puts everything into- it calms me, make me feel happy, it puts everything into proportion. Cus you realize that really we're just part of nature, it's just a cycle of life and it doesn't matter (laughs)! It will all be ok!

She later shares her thoughts about the things that help her when it gets most difficult in her life: "Yes, usually it tends to be nature, and putting things into proportion... through.. surrounding myself with nature I suppose."

Likewise, Tea has a special attachment to surfing, being out by herself on the sea as her number one hobby. She describes how she was instantly hooked when she tried it and how important it is for her to be out surfing:

..and I did love surfing from the first moment I tried it so, then ya that was it, I was gonna do it. I still love it its still my favorite I still think that a bad day in the water is better than any other day.

Even if the surfing was not good, just to have gone out on the water and try to surf is better than any day without surfing. These positive, affirming thoughts extend to being out in nature with her children doing other activities, which also generate strong positive emotions:

...and the trails, we build forts in the woods, um, I think, all kinds of shells, I mean, my dream...another moment of crying is when we're in the rock pools and my kids are snorkelling and I'm watching my kids underwater following a school of fish and its just ...AHH!

Similarly, we can see that Ella's use of the outdoor environment is helpful to her. In the previous theme, she found narrow lanes to walk along between the farms. She found herself alone in nature, and in this way, describes how it helps her: "and I think that's where I started in a way, a kind of meditation habit. It wasn't necessarily sitting and ohmmm, but it was my time to just be by myself, be in silence." When Ella moved to Scotland shortly afterward, these lanes were also available to her and she used them for the same purposes. She even discovered a much more vast area of nature as well; the Scottish Highlands:

So I would walk along the farm fields and there was a river nearby so I would walk along the river banks and, and if that wasn't enough there was a bus that left right outside the community, it stopped there, it would take you up into the highlands.. and the highlands of Scotland its the perfect place to just... ya, get lost in nature.

Getting lost in nature in the Highlands of Scotland was possibly an extension of the benefit she received from walking alone in between the farms near her community. For her, it was a natural, wild place that provided an escape and solace.

3.3.3. Subtheme 3: Upbringing can influence use of natural environments in a new country

Although all of the subjects spent time outdoors in their childhood in their home countries, only three of the subjects shared rich descriptions of their outdoor activities when they were younger. These three subjects also correspond with the subjects described in the previous subtheme, having a therapeutic relationship with nature and the outdoor environment.

Ella, Emma and Tea each recount experiences of spending time out in nature when they were young. Emma's accounts of her childhood experiences are rich in the outdoors:

Yeah I've always been passionate about plants and nature so from a young child learning the name of flowers and trees and birds and butterflies. My mother would take us for walks although we lived in this suburb she would take us out to the nearby countryside and teach us the names of the plants and animals, which I loved.

We used to be outside as much as possible weather permitting, and I was happiest playing in the garden I used to spend alot of time playing in the garden and. Well yes we each had our own little garden...

...and then we were each given a little plot and so we all had our own garden. Plus we had a lawn and my mother was really good, she would make us like tepees to play in, we had a swing and she would encourage us to play outside as much as possible.

These quotes from Emma make it almost impossible to imagine how she would be able to manage to live life *without* a garden. Tea also expresses examples of time spent as a youth back home in wild places, however these are more focused on her time spent with her grandmother and brothers, in the Florida Everglades: "So, um, but we spent a lot of time outside, a lot of time in woods in trees..." Her grandmother had a very strong message to pass on, as "she gave each of us a machete and then we would just go out and you know hike through the woods and (laughs) just bust things out of the way." The feeling from this early education in nature has apparently stayed with Tea as she expresses that "I am in love with the everglades, it's just being back there you know what I mean you just breathe in home.. it's (laughs) pretty great." It is quite clear that this past experience in her youth in the wild everglades has affected her.

Ella's memories of activities from her childhood and the outdoor environment where she grew up describe a typical child's upbringing, although there is specific reference to lanes between lawns which perhaps later turned into lanes between farms:

There were also just kind of, basically just lawns with a few paths around and then there was also a swimming pool that was open in the summer, so summer we would always go to the swimming pool cus who doesn't want to go swimming? And at other times we would run around on the lawns and stuff. Ride our bikes on the paths and skates, we used to use a lot of skates...

Memories of the landscape and natural environment where she grew up and later lived was awakened by the concern she had about moving to London to do a masters program:

So I knew from the beginning it would be a challenge, because I have always lived in, if not rural, semi-rural settings ah, where I've had access to nature and walk in amongst trees that have been there for hundreds of years and so on, so, I knew it would be a challenge but I was determined to do this.

This extract implies the difficulty of not having the familiar outdoor landscape and the nature "safety net" that she grew up with. She would eventually learn to tap into this in when she moved away from home, to Ireland and Scotland, where she found the lanes between the farms to be so helpful to her.

3.3.4. Subtheme 4: Feelings towards outdoor environments influence dwelling choices

This subtheme appeared as subjects recounted their thoughts and experiences in choosing where to live, and where they ended up living, in their new country. For Emma and Tea, the outdoor environment had a large part to play in where they

ended up. For Ella, the outdoor environment is a critical component of where she would like to live in the future:

Ya, I've been thinking alot about actually I don't want a house or a .. I would love either a van or a boat or something like that so a home that I can make mine, a space that can be mine but that I can move around in so that I can keep...

She discusses moving towards a dwelling that is mobile: "for the foreseeable future I'm working towards having a van or a boat something like that that I can live in but move around in..." This kind of open road living appeals to Ella, and it involves being more outside than inside, having a home that is fully mobile. The focus for her is certainly more about being in an environment not bounded by walls, nor with any fixed address.

When Emma chose to move from home for the first time, she was presented with a choice of cities that offered a job as an English teacher. Madrid, the large capital inland city in Spain and San Sebastian in the north, were two of the shortlisted choices:

So I didn't fancy Madrid as a big capital city away from the sea, I don't like city life much I prefer to live in a village... near nature- its always been sort of very important to me- near the sea, and near nature so.. I said ok, San Sebastian.

As discussed above, she spent a long time looking for a house with a garden once she settled in Spain and started a family. Although it cost her and her family dearly, this was a very significant aspect of her dwelling choice: "I live in part of an old farmhouse with a very large garden which is one of my main reasons for living here."

We've had to make alot of sacrifices and compromises for me to be able to live in what I think is a real house, in other words, with an upstairs and a downstairs. even beams and things, which I love.. it's a very.. its about 300 years old this place, so a house with character, with a garden.

She later describes Devon, a place in the UK where she would consider moving to, when asked about places in her home country where she would enjoy living:

So yea its beautiful green countryside with not such high mountains as here, they're hills rather than mountains. There's hills and woods and streams and rivers and its a kind of mild but wet climate...like here (laughs).. so yea, plenty of nature everywhere. There is a north coast which is quite wild with cliffs and quite a wild sea and then the south coast is gentler with sandy beaches- well there are some sandy beaches in the north as well... Ah, so yea just a lovely place to live and lots of historical towns and villages just like here, so.. yea. I guess that's the sort of place I like living.

These rich descriptions that she gives of this region in the United Kingdom are full of colorful details about nature and the outdoor environment. Clearly for her, these elements are important when rationalizing a place to live. In this description it was only based on a hypothetical example of where she might want to live in the UK. Nevertheless for her current dwelling, it was critical to find a place with outdoor space and a garden, as she has found.

The reasons that Tea recounts for living in the town that she currently resides also is heavily influenced by the outdoor environment, including her love of being out surfing on the water: " I live in Hendaye France um, it's a little south western corner right on the ocean next to the mountains, that's why we picked it..." She goes on to reaffirm an important reason why she and her family have moved here: "I surf, that's one of the reasons we live here, so I do that as often as I can...um, and then um, to get through the winter (laughs)." The importance of this need to surf is entwined with her familial duties: "And so I wanted to be able to live so close that before work I could run out, have a quick surf, run back and still get to work on time or get the kids to school." These quotations explain how the choice of residence for Tea is connected with her appreciation and need for the outdoor environment: "I can see the ocean from my window, so.. (laughs). I used to fight the good fight in the world, and now I have a view."

These themes and subthemes regarding the importance of the outdoor environments for those who have moved countries are often described in a very positive light. The experience of moving countries can evoke feelings that require meaningful and powerful efforts to maintain that level of positivity, in order to counteract the many challenges and difficulties faced by international migrants. The next and final theme explores these positive reflections when the subjects self-reflect on their experiences in new countries.

3.4. Acceptance and advancement

Throughout the course of analysing the data, it became apparent that the subjects wanted to express something positive, that they were proud of in spite of all the challenges that they faced. In some way, the results describe how each of the subjects wanted to talk about moving on with life in the new country, accepting the challenges and embracing the rewards of their hard-earned endeavour. This happened across the entire data set, and each instance was prompted from different questions rather than any one single question. This theme of understanding and accepting the new life caused positive self-reflection stemming from the expressed perceived benefits and successes of living in the new countries. These range from the importance of a nuclear family and real friends, to feelings of safety and personal life revelations.

3.4.1. Subtheme 1: New family and real friends

The first theme, discussed above, presented different challenges that the subjects faced, and they commonly related the hardships of missing family and friends. This last theme revisits the importance of family and friends, but more as a benchmark for newfound happiness. In this theme, subjects talk about creating and maintaining a cherished nuclear family, and making new, true friends in their new environment. Bea, for example, has this to say about her nuclear family and their experiences in France, the country that they have moved to:

I think, I think my proudest accomplishment is bringing the kids over here thus far- and that was hard, initially that was (inhales), when my son was 10 when we moved here, and he had a really hard time at first, because he left all his friends and...I was really worried about that.

In fact there was a conversation that he had with another kid- a mutual friend, son of a mutual friend and said: 'I had a really hard time coming here at first, now it makes sense to me..' uh, and I saw my son saying...and now he knows, now he gets it, so, ok! We made the right choice!

But the kids and I ... really enjoy each other's company, and we make each other laugh, and laugh, and laugh and its almost like hanging out with your best friends or cousins, and you know I, I, I worry that I don't want to put that kind of pressure on my kids to... fill that place for me, I don't know but, but we have a blast.

The concept of achieving something as significant as moving countries with your family, and relying on them, enjoying it with them, also resonates with Emma. Here, she relates first moving to Spain and starting a family:

So yea the idea was to like come for 9 months, learn some Spanish and then try again, try to get to South America.. yea.. then I met my husband, and got pregnant very quickly and... yea! now I'm 32 years later (laughs) I never got to South America, but never mind, I've been on other adventures, that's alright!

They say (laughs) love conquers all and it did in our case i guess cus we, we managed to stay together and, yea, we had our first child very quickly, just before I was 32, uh, I already had Laura, that wasn't planned either, but again, best thing that's ever happened to me.

Ella, who has not started a family, shares her experiences of making real friends in the countries she moved to. Her quotes clearly express the value of having those new friends, and what that meant to her when she moved to a new country:

One of the main things at that point especially was just having those friends around me, cus even though my room was a mess, they didn't even comment on it and they didn't care and they still wanted to spend time with me, so.. and for me that was, that really helped. Ya, having those friends...

The friends that she found when she moved away from her home country were so supportive for them, even if they didn't provide any conversation, advice or comment: "Ya, and sometimes we didn't even talk, sometimes we would just sit in silence together and that was what we needed..." These friends that she made in Ireland were important for Ella, also elaborated above, in the second theme. The socializing activities that were presented in the second theme yielded these valuable friends that she would come to rely on.

3.4.2. Subtheme 2: A greater sense of security

In Tea's case, the thoughts of safety and security in the new country were worth sharing, especially since the feelings of security were deteriorating in her home country. In this extract, she describes the fears from her home country and the sense of security in her new one;

And its the same reason I don't live in America, with the guns and the schools its also a terrifying place to live and people say, no, no no that's just the big cities, its not the big cities its again weaponry is everywhere it is pervasive. I wanted to find a place that was um, tranquil, secure...

... and I wanted to raise them sort of internationally and it was a good chance for me finally to immerse myself in my husband's culture because I had taken a back seat to all the other languages that I had been learning, so it was a good opportunity and here is incredibly safe.

Bea also shares the concern with safety in her home country, which is a significant reason for her to be in a different country where she feels safer:

I feel relieved about being here. We drop off our kids to go to school, and there isn't that horrible thought that passes through our mind that.. is there going to be a giant shooting at our school today?

3.4.3. Subtheme 3: Evoking profound self-reflection

Life in a new country can take many turns, and creates so many possibilities both good and bad. When people choose to share their thoughts from those experiences in a positive way, while imparting some gained wisdom, it is worth noting. Ella shares her experiences of living in a challenging new country and community, and how it can make you profoundly self-reflect:

Living with people with special needs, again it forces you to look at yourself when you are with people who are vulnerable, because they force you to be vulnerable, and so you then need to look at your own vulnerability alot. And of course that's.. has its own difficulties, its not always great and, ya, they're intense situations, difficult situations but on the whole I never regretted being there. Or even during the hardest moments, there was always a sense of, I have a purpose, and I want to be here, I want to make this work.

This experience she relates is so important, she has to share how it has affected her: "So it was intense in a very emotional personal, deep way. It made me confront a lot of things in my life and my past."

So even though I was a mess inside and my room was maybe a mess, I still had something that I had to do, and it was important for me to do it, and I think that really helped me to just.. ok sometimes some thing can be a mess but it doesn't mean that everything needs to be a mess and there are things that I can still do right, even though maybe I can't keep my room tidy.. I can still milk a cow!

These thoughts of self-reflection can also lead to an understanding of oneself. In these extracts, the action of moving countries has appeared to motivate this greater understanding. Emma summarizes her life experiences while reflecting on the most important aspects, revealing some insightful thoughts:

Yes, as a child, and as a young adult as well a few things happened... and at the time it was like...gosh it was almost the end of the world and so on and now I see you know what? if I had to do it again, there isn't probably a lot I would change, cus its all part of a process and I alw- (pauses) I always really, wanted to explore and be curious.

There were times that Emma really reminisced deeply about her life experiences abroad, without regret: "I have been close to suicide, very, very depressed at times and really struggling but I haven't been bored (laughs) so.. eh, so that's, I got what I wished for."

These four themes extracted from the results of the data analysis provide a wide spectrum of the plight of some international migrants, from their perspectives. These challenges that they faced and some of the factors that helped them are discussed in the next section, and they appear to be well researched in various sources of literature. The use of outdoor environments by these international migrants is less well connected to the literature however, though certain theories will be presented as contributing factors.

4. Discussion

In the results described above, themes have emerged from the data that have ties to previous research, such as the challenges faced, some of the coping strategies, and the concept of acceptance and moving on in a new country. The research is scarce however, when the theme regarding the role of nature and the outdoor environment on migration is explored. The international migrants studied in this project have expressed a strong connection, almost like a lifeline, to elements of nature and the outdoor environments in their detailed accounts of life in a new country. Above all, the concepts of having social support, and the support of an outdoor environment, are shown to have a significant effect for international migrants. Each theme and subtheme are revisited below in the context of the reviewed research, and the importance of the outdoor environment is highlighted from the results.

4.1. Alienation, language and lost lifelines

International migrants face a number of challenges that are unique to moving from a home country. In the first theme, many of the subjects described their challenges and the common difficulties that they faced. These included missing family and friends, alienation stemming from cultural differences leading to a difficulty making new friends, and sacrifices made for children. Often these difficulties resulted in some form of distress, either mental or emotional, as described in the extracts above in the results. Similar results have been recorded in research involving international migrants, and they point to similar struggles living in a new country. For example, Lassetter & Callister (2009) present findings regarding the factors contributing to the health of voluntary migrants. Both the effects of losing home social networks and experiencing the new cultural and language barrier are described as negatively affecting the physical and mental health of voluntary migrants. In another study by Dow (2011), feelings of loneliness and isolation are shown to develop for immigrants who have lost their home social networks. These individuals are then more prone to developing depression and anxiety. Poulakis et al. (2017) also provide results on the stressors

related to international students stemming from the language barrier and family isolation. The language barrier has also been studied by others, such as Constantine et al. (2004) and Farver et al. (2002), who have further established negative correlations between language fluency and levels of reported depression among international students. Brown (2008) has also reported that the dominant stressors for some international migrants include the concept of isolation- through lost contacts, the separation of friends and family from home, and local pressures. These pressures are defined as the everyday challenges of living in a foreign culture, coupled with concerns of health and security.

The concept of sacrificing one's choice to live in a country based on the welfare of their children, as in Tea's case, is also documented in some of the literature. Dustmann (2003) has confirmed this in a study of international migrants with children, who have moved back to the parental country based on altruistic motives towards the offspring. In Tea's situation, this ultimately has ended in France, the country of her husband's origin, where they have decided to settle for the unforeseeable future. Bea has also chosen France as the country to settle, albeit difficult with her son's learning challenges and the anxieties they caused. France was chosen for the reasons of safety, general social benefit for the family, and the language advantage for the two children. The data show that the things international migrants face are quite unique, difficult and require special solutions.

Although none of these examples are unique in the literature, the first theme confirms common challenges facing international migrants; alienation, the language barrier, missing family and old friends. The next theme regarding coping mechanisms also has good representation in previous research.

4.2. How to move forward?

People deal with new challenges in different ways and the stress that accompanies these challenges is an important factor in their health. The results in this study have described difficulties such as host language fluency, PTSD, loneliness, lack of acceptance, making real friends and other barriers to adapting in their new countries. Stress can cause many health conditions, both physical and mental. Thoits (2010) has presented findings on over 40 years of research on sociological stress and among her findings is that when stressors such as traumas, negative events and chronic strains are comprehensively measured, their impacts on mental and physical health are substantial. Although the data in the results of this study have not specifically mentioned stress, they have noted the difficulties in their experiences moving abroad, and other major life challenges as described above. Berry (1997) has studied the unique circumstances of cultural adaptation or acculturation when an individual moves to a new country. He notes that it is an

inevitable process as individuals manage and cope with the stressors brought on by migration and the prolonged exposure to a new host culture. In a later article, Berry (2005) dichotomizes the forms of dealing with acculturation and introduces a temporal perspective. He identifies two major forms of dealing with acculturation; the first is a long-term behavioural shift, and the second focuses on how the individual deals with the new culture initially and over time. The latter is more reactive and tends to involve stress reactions, responding to life events in the experience of acculturation. This current project focuses more on the latter factor, as the long-term behavioural data has not been collected and studied. The concept of stress and coping with stress is at the centre of Lazarus & Folkman's (1984) seminal book, which describes how coping and stress become most important when one experiences a major life event or challenge.

Different strategies for coping with these difficulties are also present in current literature. Kuo (2014) has reviewed a large body of literature that examined acculturation and the psychological and mental health adaptation among migrants, and highlighted the role of coping in mitigating the effects of the acculturative and non-acculturative stress. Similar to the second theme presented above, there are many common coping activities that international migrants engage in, both alone and in social situations. Individual factors such as hardiness and personal growth initiatives have been studied by Yakunina et al. (2013) and show that various individual factors contribute to successes with acculturation among international students. Ra & Trusty (2017) also conducted a study with international students in which the findings were consistent with previous research on the role of social support in lowering stress in and adapting to a new culture. Hajro et al. (2019) and Yakushko (2010) confirm this as well, but they add dimensions not reported in this project. The latter reference describes two additional strategies that stand out; spiritual and religious practices, and seeking help from professionals. The former reference adds the employer's organizational dimension for skilled migrants moving specifically for employment reasons. Both these examples differ from the results of this study, as they seem to fall in between the individual and social-based strategies.

For highly skilled migrants who have moved to China, Selmer (1999) reports that social strategies through interacting with host country groups were deemed more effective as a problem-solving strategy versus the symptom-focused strategy involving seeking social support from other expatriates. This result can be seen in Kaya of this study, who was able to join a local group of friends when she first arrived in Spain and subsequently reported less stress from her acculturation process. Conversely, we see the struggles that others had claimed, not having been able to find access to these local social groups.

Many of the individual and social or group-centered strategies presented in the results section of this report are well documented in the studies referenced above,

however less well documented are the affects of use of outdoor environments and being in nature individually, as a way to counteract the stress of cultural adaptation. Very little current literature discusses this connection. Some recent references point to the use of natural environments as ways to promote immigrant assimilation (Gentin et al. 2019). Others link general outdoor recreation to immigrants' self-reported feelings of increased health in urban green spaces, with a dominant focus on social integration (Leikkilä et al. 2013). Still others refer to the concept of *appreciative* outdoor recreation, which involves enjoying nature without technological mediation (motorized transport) or altering it (hunting), correlating it to a strong connection with nature and higher psychological well-being (Wolsko & Lindberg 2013). In my research of the literature only one article by Yakushko (2010) mentions the individual value of "being in nature" as part of an immigrant's constructive coping strategy. There was no further elaboration on this value, and neither was there a tally of the number of subjects that identified it (out of 20 subjects interviewed). However reading, talking to friends, cooking and building new friendships were all identified as constructive coping strategies in this study by several of the subjects interviewed. Stodolska et al. (2017) have claimed that throughout their extensive literature review, there have been no systematic investigations into the role of leisure in natural environments in immigrants' adaptation that have been undertaken. Furthermore, they also argue that the stress-relieving functions of natural environments are likely to be an important aspect of immigrants' quality of life. This is clearly the case for Emma, Tea and Ella, from this study, as they have described their experiences in new countries in natural environments with such affirming descriptions; Emma in her garden, Tea in the ocean surfing and Ella walking along the narrow farm paths, each of them alone. Since none of the literature reviewed can confidently link the benefit of natural environments to the relief from cultural adaptation stressors, the next section makes indirect links through various sources in the literature.

4.3. Tapping into the open source

In the third theme of this report, the majority of the subjects identified the importance of the outdoor environment in providing some comfort, when they moved countries. The literature supports this in an indirect way, describing the benefit of the outdoor environment to individuals who have some level of stress, whether in their home country or not. The mechanism of this connection to health and the natural environments has its roots in ART and SRT as described in the introduction of this paper, and has led to many studies confirming the benefits of the natural environment to people experiencing stress. The type of stress and how it is measured is an interesting discussion, as Kondo et al. (2018) report. Though

it is worth noting that not all stress is equal and how it is measured should be considered, they have nonetheless reported that heart rate, blood pressure and self-reporting offer the most convincing support for the benefits of natural environments. Hansmann et al. (2007) conclude that visiting various urban green spaces can reduce psychological stress, especially when combined with longer visits and practicing sports. Ewert & Chang (2018) have also reported benefits and conclude that those who visit natural environments report lower stress levels compared with those that visit more urban outdoor settings. A literature review on exposure to natural environments and its effects on stress by Haluza et al. (2014) reports positive results on the harmonizing effects of nature on stress reactions in the majority of studies reviewed. In cases of stress-related disorders, natural environments have been specifically designed and used as part of a therapeutic process to improve the health of patients (Gentin et al. 2018). It is this therapeutic aspect of natural environments that is discussed further in the next section.

4.3.1. True nature therapy

The analysis of the results in this report have shown the importance of natural environments, but there are specific instances in the data that provide very rich descriptions of the use of outdoor environments. Surfing in the open ocean, spending time maintaining a large garden and walking through country lanes between farms are largely therapeutic outdoor settings where some of the subjects have described a substantial benefit. Stigsdotter et al. (2011) elaborate greatly on this concept, and state that an individual may develop well-being just by being in a garden or in the presence of nearby nature, with or without active involvement. This is the particular focus of the therapeutic effects described by the subjects, as the settings were not specifically designed for therapeutic purposes, nor was a therapist present. The fact the each subject found and used their outdoor places to reach a positive effect, in their new country, validates the many claims of the healing and stress-relieving qualities of nature. What's more, these specific environments may have provided a supporting role in grounding the subjects, providing a place where they could make sense of things, gather their thoughts and even to provide an escape from the severity of newfound challenges. These concepts have been articulated in Kaplan's theory of attention restoration, specifically in the properties of *being away*, *extent*, and *compatibility*.

Being away can be likened to a mental or physical escape from an everyday place. *Extent* refers to the scope of an outdoor environment both physical but also speaks to the connectedness with the area, which keeps one engaged. *Compatibility* refers to the support and fit that an environment provides with what a person is inclined to do (Kaplan 2001). As presented above, Emma spends time in her garden to "*put things into proportion (p. 29)*", and her inclination is to

spend as much time and whatever spare energy she has there. She also states her gardening is *"more than a hobby really, its almost therapy at times (p.29)"*. Ella also escapes to the country lanes between the farms away from the stressful community where she worked and lived to perform her *"meditation habit (p.28)"*. Tea uses the vast ocean for the same purpose, to focus on surfing and being on the water, and nothing else. A fourth subject, Kaya, also describes her current hobby *"to escape and go hiking walking running, by myself in nature. (p.27)"* So these subjects have found outdoor environments that supported them in a foreign country where they have experienced many unique stressors. The quotations from the subjects show clearly that they have found and used certain outdoor environments to help them in their new countries. The next section discusses findings from the data that offer a possible explanation for why this may have transpired for certain subjects.

4.3.2. History of nature

An interesting finding extracted from the data in this project may provide a partial explanation for the use of natural environments in new countries. Each interviewee was asked a general open-ended question about early life in their home countries, including interests. The narrations of three of the five interviewees included extensive time in the outdoor environment during childhood. For Tea it was the woods and the Florida everglades where she spent time with her brothers and grandmother. She also spent much time in the ocean learning to surf over many years, and now she regards the ocean as the place that provides her main recreation. Ella recounts her childhood experience in a rural region filled with descriptions of playing outside, having access to nature and old forests, but she also mentions the lawns that she used to play on which had few narrow paths between them. In her early adult life when she first moved countries on her own, she found herself again on these narrow lanes between farms walking alone and using that environment in a meditative way. Similarly, Emma was very fond of nature and was engaged in her childhood home garden early, and went on many interpretive walks with her mother in the English countryside to learn the names of trees and plants. She would later convince her family to invest in an expensive property in Spain that was specifically chosen for its garden where she now spends all of her free time. Though it is difficult to prove causality in all these cases, the finding comes from the collated data extracts after much review and analysis.

Literature related to this finding is scarce, with the majority of studies focusing on correlating childhood involvement in natural environments and adult environmentalism (Wells & Lekies 2006). Lohr & Pearson-Mims (2004) have connected early childhood participation in outdoor activities to an appreciation of trees and nature in adults, but nothing further is discussed in the broader context

as discussed here. In this project, the experiences that each of the subjects describe in their adult life, undergoing significant life experiences in a new country, do demonstrate their appreciation of the natural environment. This appreciation does not specifically translate to environmental activism, awareness or sensitivity as discussed by Chawla (1998), but it does indicate a strong behaviour pattern biased towards using some element of the outdoors later in life. This connection has potential for further areas of research, as a potential alternative to other forms of psychological therapy for those experiencing major life changes, such as moving countries.

4.3.3. Homeward bound, in nature

In this section, the subtheme of residential choice as provided in the data is discussed. Specifically, the analysis shows that the outdoor environment heavily influences choices towards residence location. Tea has finally chosen to settle and raise a family and wanted to be on the coast, near the sea so that she could surf regularly, even amidst other household duties. Emma chose the house she lives in specifically for the garden, and Ella wants to buy and live in a boat or van, where she will be mobile and almost certainly outdoors most of the time. Literature is also limited in this concept of connecting residence choice to the outdoors, though indirect connections to higher quality of life has been positively correlated with the visual contact of greens mountain slopes for some residents (Conedera et al. 2015). Some of the literature has indicated that people consider the quality of the surrounding outdoor environment of a new residence as a mobility process, usually tending upward along with the residence quality and size (Clark et al. 2004). Others have studied the effect of moving to greener urban areas and shown a positive correlation with sustained mental health improvements (Alcock et al. 2014), though some have considered this evidence to be weak and the benefits unclear (Lee & Maheswaran 2011). Whether or not the subjects interviewed in this project were aware of these trends, the descriptions and reasons that they gave for their current residence choices clearly show a preference towards the outdoor environment. It may be beyond the scope of this project to be able to establish causal links, however it is intriguing that these same subjects correspond to those discussed in the previous section, regarding a dominant upbringing in the outdoors.

4.4. Moving, then moving on

Finally, the last theme in the result of this study points to the value of having a nuclear family, of making real friends and actively working with the social support system available. Through creating new families and social networks, the

subjects may be working on a new type of place attachment, now that their attachment to previous countries has been disrupted. This has been theorized by Brown and Perkins (1992), who describe that the important final stage of place disruption is building new attachments. It is no surprise that the comments regarding perceived benefits of the new country, such as increased safety and security, appeared in the results. This kind of positive thinking as a way to feel comfortable with accepting the new country is a function of place attachment, and it provides an important psychological benefit (Scannell & Gifford 2014). Likewise, the social factors reported in the data of having and needing real friends, having meaningful encounters with local people have resonated clearly across the entire data set. Although this study is not trying to validate the social identity connection with place, as theorized by Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996), the value of establishing a social circle in a new country, either through family, friends, or both has clearly been articulated as important in the data.

Results from the data have also presented noteworthy impressions of reflecting on life in a new country, which provides some interesting lessons to anyone who dares to move from their home country. Those who have used the outdoor environment in both childhood and in the new country that they moved to, express a very positive outlook on their lives. They have also been able to articulate a clear sense of understanding oneself in this unique context. Presence of a nuclear family, having old friends and making true, new friends both in a native and foreign country, these aspects are extremely important for people. The outdoor environment also claims its importance, because it offers a therapeutic quality that can even affect a person's choice of residence, especially when the influence started at childhood. Above all, we can observe that the things that are important to people during challenging times provide insight into what is truly important in people's lives.

5. Conclusions

The aim of this project was to explore three questions; how the outdoor environment can be used by international migrants as they move countries, whether or not it helps them, and if so, where this connection originates. This study answers the first question by demonstrating how the outdoor environment is clearly used in a personal and healing way, bringing focus to the struggles of adapting to a new culture. The individualistic aspect of being in nature shows how it can be quite a deep and personal experience. Actively seeking out and using the outdoor environments has been described in the data and has shown to result in positive, therapeutic benefits, which are even considered essential for some.

The second research question is answered with a resounding yes, there is a helpful aspect to using nature and the outdoor environment. This therapeutic effect has been shown to provide a range of benefits, from getting "lost" in nature, to being able to get a unique perspective in one's life. It provides a type of individual meditative benefit, as it frees the subject from the demands of a foreign society that can be difficult to negotiate on a daily basis. The fact that some of the data suggest nature can be a guide to a person's choice of residence also well describes the way in which this connection can be expressed and the effect it has on a person's life.

The last research question, regarding how this mechanism functions, is demonstrated in the data by examples of extensive childhood experiences in the outdoors. A strong connection between a person's upbringing in the outdoors and subsequent current use of outdoor environments as a way to help cope with the stressors in a new country has been presented. Although some of the data also point to the importance of social factors, such as a nuclear family and making new friends to help satisfy a part of what is critical in establishing oneself in a new country, the natural environment cannot be understated. For some, it has become a continuation of historic positive outdoor experiences that continue to provide a supporting role in their lives.

These are the two most important findings in this study; the importance of having social support and the importance of support from an outdoor environment when the stresses and challenges of a major life event, moving countries, takes place. Ottosson & Grahn (2008) have also concluded that frequency of

experiences in nature reduces the effect from crises, while also acknowledging a strong influence of the social factor in the rehabilitation from these crises. The pathways of the aid provided by nature and socialization are already documented in the literature; the only thing remaining is to connect the benefit with the condition. It should be clear that the outdoor environment *can* be used more extensively to engage those who experience struggles from moving countries. Some individuals might find the social factor more beneficial, but based on this study another valid determinant may be an upbringing with a strong influence in exposure to nature and the outdoors. These connections offer options in alternative therapeutic treatments for some, and provide interesting directions for research in migration and health studies.

As discussed above, this study has focused on the plight of international migrants sharing their experiences moving to and living in a new country. Their challenges and coping mechanisms were initially conceptualized in a short-term time frame. However, as Berry (2005) suggests, a longer-term behavioural shift may be what we are observing in the results, as evidenced by the last theme of adapting and moving on. Furthermore, perhaps the higher self-reported level of life satisfaction and mental health of international migrants really is an indicator of these important things, compared with non-migrants as Berry & Hou (2016) have concluded. This lends support to the concept that the experience gained for international migrants is valuable, especially where they have explored the use of outdoor environments.

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