

Growing herbs at Concordia: learning through tradition

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ABSTRACT

Growing herbs at Concordia: Learning through tradition

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There are many opportunities for informal learning in and around universities. At Concordia University, the Greenhouse and the Loyola Farm are the settings where students and community member grow many vegetables and herbs as volunteers or participants in the Internship program for the medicinal usage of herbs. Two main theoretical lenses are used in this thesis: Kolb's Experiential Learning and Mezirow's Transformative Learning. Three data sets are examined: First, the results of semi-structured interviews of seven Concordia students; second, the documentary analysis of traditions and projects at Concordia, from its inception, found in the archives and related to herbs and sustainability; third, the researcher's personal experience gained working in the Loyola herb garden during the Internship program.

Eight themes were extracted from the data collected: (1) Experience of being around one's own garden; (2) Slowly learning to speak the language of herbs; (3) Capture and regeneration of traditional knowledge from personal and multi-generational networks; (4) Interest in alternative and traditional healing; (5) Critique of the capitalist, invasive ways of healing (the political); (6) Learning together - brings people together; (7) Traditional healing practices are regaining importance; (8) Volunteers see their involvement as adding something greater than themselves – what the Jesuit fathers described as “To be a man for others”. These specific learning opportunities are embedded in the synergy of traditions of Concordia. I therefore hope that others will pick up some of these leads and continue the praxis launched by the exploratory research on which this thesis is based.

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Growing herbs at Concordia: learning through tradition

Chapter One: Developing the Idea

This chapter explores the way herbal tradition, learning theories and my personal interests came together and formed the basis of my research project.

Herbs have been used for healing and for food for thousands of years. This knowledge has been transferred from one person to another. Nowadays, there are many recipes collected in books and oral traditions of different nations. There are still countries where most of the population uses traditional medicine practices based on herbs (e.g., China). The indigenous people around the world and some sectors and citizens of developing countries also keep this heritage alive.

Because of my personal experience and values, herbs have been a part of my life for many years. This is why, when my professor told me that there is a herb garden established at Concordia, I felt a growing interest to find out about this project. It turned out to be part of the Sustainable Concordia initiative, a “[...] garden, started in 2006, which grows herbs and produce to support the People’s Potato, a vegan soup kitchen that serves 400 meals daily to Concordia students on a pay-as-you-can basis.” (Giovannetti, 2011).

The idea of farming and sustainability in the university appealed to me for a few different reasons. First, my personal experience and interest in this and related topics have led me to learn more about herbs and helped me to put this knowledge to practice, so that it has become a lifestyle and part of my value-system. Second, as a student in the MA in Educational Studies program, I found that such a project could bring new synergy

in the lives of students who are involved in it. They are studying in formal programs at the university, but they also volunteer in this project and participate in its activities and gain experience and learning in farming and herb growing activities, benefiting from non-formal education as Thight (2002) refers to these volunteer opportunities. The volunteer activities are not part of the official program and student syllabus, but are chosen by the students, and as such, probably carry relevance and special value for them. It is important to note here that Concordia University has now put in place a system to recognize such activities, and the learning that results from volunteering, on the official transcript of the student who participates in such activities (Charlebois, 2011)

This synergy is very much related to the fourth pillar of the 21st Century education, as defined by UNESCO: “Learning to be, so as better to develop one’s personality and be able to act with ever greater autonomy, judgment and personal responsibility” (Delors, 1996, p. 37). “Learning to Be” is connected tightly with personal and shared societal goals, but is based on the individual’s independent choices and preferences.

Last but not least, the growing and use of herbs today, is the continuation of an old tradition and the transmission of a body of knowledge developed over centuries. The practice today is definitely different from what it used to be a hundred years ago. It has evolved based on experience and it aims to build a “learning society founded on the acquisition, renewal and use of knowledge” (Delors, 1996, p. 22). Therefore, it is a link to previously existing experience: “While education should, therefore, constantly adapt to changes in society, it must not fail to pass on the attainments, foundations and benefits of human experience” (Delors, p. 22).

Research Questions

By engaging in this research process, I wanted to find out and analyze the learning that takes place in the lives of students who volunteer for a Sustainable Concordia Project. I wanted to understand the way knowledge about herbs, as elements of traditional knowledge, makes meaning to volunteers today. The research question I wanted to answer is as follows: What are the reasons behind the desire of some students and members of the staff of Concordia's Green House, based at the Loyola Campus, to grow herbs and how this engagement interacts with their beliefs, their acquisition of new knowledge, their lifestyle and health management? Related questions are: Do students think there is a value that this particular form of engagement brings to their learning, to their lives and what is it? Is there any transformative learning change in their thinking or way of living that this experience unlocks? What are the consequences of their involvement in this particular informal and non-formal educational activity?

Personal links with the research questions. At the end of April 2011, regulations on natural health products, among which are herbs and products derived from them came into force in the European Union. In 2004, regulations concerning the use and sale of natural products were introduced in Canada, and a six-year period of implementation started. Many questions were raised about the reasons behind these measures and their impacts, especially in the Western world – namely Europe, the United States and Canada.

The website of Health Canada states that

To be legally sold in Canada, all natural health products must have a product licence, and the Canadian sites that manufacture, package, label and import these products must have site licences.

To get product and site licences, specific labelling and packaging requirements must be met, good manufacturing practices must be followed, and proper safety and efficacy evidence must be provided.

(Health Canada, 2015, About the Regulations, para 2-3)

The new regulations raise many questions, both among the producers of the Natural health products (NHP), as well as among the Natural health practitioners. Lots of research and many debates tried to foresee the consequences for all participants. The research was due to the revived interest in healing with natural products in the last 20 years, and to increased value and volume of the production and sales of these products. For example, in 2001 75% of Canadians were using natural remedies (i.e., vitamins, minerals and herbals) (Laeque, Boon et al., 2006). Further, the research of Laeque, Boon et al. suggests that Canadian health product industry is divided – about 50 % consists of small and middle size companies, but there are also multimillion dollar companies with a large market share. Prognosis was that as a result from the new regulations, some small companies might be forced to leave the business. The estimate was that the sales of natural products equal approximately 4.3 billion dollars, which partially explains the worries and fears among all the stakeholders in the process of implementation of the regulations.

The main reason for introduction of these regulations in the European Union, USA and Canada is stated to be the safety of products. Concerns include the increased self-healing, natural products taken by pregnant women, interaction between herbs and pharmaceuticals (Rousseaux & Schachter, 2003), the presence of heavy metals and pesticides in the herbs, substitutes in many of the packed products, to name some of them. People must know what is in the products, what are the main and additional

ingredients, terms of usage and potential side effects, as it is done for the chemically derived medications.

The increased consumption of natural products is shown to be affiliated more with self-care practices, rather than with the prescription from a health practitioner, as evident in the UK, USA and Canada (Moss, Boon, Ballantyne and Kachan, 2006). Main concerns of the practitioners are if and to what extent they will have access to products they need in order to practice their form of healing effectively; also a possible limitation of their role. An interesting point appears in the research of Moss, Boon et al, made by interviewing 37 leaders from 4 different groups - Naturopaths, Traditional Chinese Medicine practitioners, Homeopaths and Western Herbalists. Western herbalists were not concerned that the NHP regulations would increase the rate of, or risks associated with, self-medication. One participant explained that herbalists want the public to be able to look after themselves

I like the idea that if it was a cold or an insect bite that people should be able to know what to do and we have lost a lot of that....sometimes people need to know how to use things....we have to be able to explain on the label clearly what this is known to be good for and the proper usage of it (as cited in Moss, Boon et al., 2006).

Despite the fact that the most of Natural Health Practitioners admitted the need for more regulations on the sales of natural products, which will result in more efficacy and safety, there were also more radical views concerning the reasons behind the regulations, the results and even the fear that institutional involvement might result in violation. In USA, practitioners accept that there is need for some regulations, but not these offered by Food and Drug Administration (FDA), as “more side effects from herbal usage are due to

improper and excessive use of correctly identified herbs, rather than from incorrectly identified or substituted herb species”, writes Wicke. (Some concerns, 1997). As he continues,

...There is a need for developing more accurate and appropriate means for assessing client's health so that contraindicated herbs may be more easily recognized and avoided. Chinese herbal and Ayurvedic methods are examples of how this may be achieved by one's skills in observation and with minimal technology. (Wicke, Some concerns, 1997).

In 2008, some organizations from Canada, USA and Europe which consist of practitioners, producers, institutions, business and people interested in health and wellness reached by natural means organized a conference to address, as they describe it, the International Natural Health Crisis. They discussed the obvious similarities in all regulations to limit the use of natural products. As stated there, the main challenges included “regulators exceeding their legal authority, ignoring court rulings, overstating and skewing human health risks associated with the use of natural health products, discriminating against traditional medicinal cultures and censoring truthful health information”. (BusinessWire, 23 September 2008, para 3).

I have gained personal experience in using herbs for healing, growing up in my native country, Bulgaria, in Europe. As I now live in Canada, I felt personally challenged to explore this topic deeper. Are the proposed changes in regulations steps towards a new approach to health care, one which will include social, political and cultural dimensions, or, as many voices in the general public claim, they will remain in the realm and limitations imposed by scientific medicine? Will these measures actually have a more controlling, rather than regulating function, in order to preserve the status-

quo of the well-established capitalist medicine with its medico-pharmaceutical industry, where health care is a market commodity, and no real change is meant to be made?

Bulgaria, my native country, has strong traditions in using herbs for both food and medicinal purposes. As Ploetz and Orr (2004) mention, there are about 12, 350 plants, out of which 270 are endemic (p. 232). In Europe, Bulgaria is the largest exporter of herbs and one of the biggest in the world, with up to 15 000 tons every year (Aladzhem, 2000).

One of the most famous Bulgarian herbalist-healers is Petar Dimkov, who lived towards the end of 19th and the first half of the 20th century. His book, *Българска Народна Медицина [Bulgarian Folk Medicine]*, was published in four volumes by the Bulgarian Academy of Science (Димков, 1991). So my experience in the healing power of herbs was first rooted in the Bulgarian traditions, then in my personal interest towards medicine and a holistic approach, my strong relation with nature and, my allergy to many modern medications which I discovered at the age of 16. Herbs became my preferred choice for food, treatment of illness, prevention, and maintenance of a healthy lifestyle. I have tried different recipes and have used imported and Bulgarian herbal medications. I used to go picking herbs every year in the mountains in Bulgaria, and sometimes I visited healers, one of whom became my good friend many years ago. In Bulgaria in every food store one can buy a selection of herbal teas used mostly in winter for colds and cases of the flu.

The use of herbs, though, is an issue that is very much debated recently regarding healing and contemporary medicine. In developed countries, the concentration of the pharmaceutical companies and the principles of capitalism lead to the monopolization of

health care in a specific sector of the economy and to feelings of helplessness and over-dependence by citizens on the opinion of medical professionals and prescription drugs.

A shift towards increased responsibility to know more and make choices for our own health, through self-education, could probably bring a change in power structures in society. As Heredia (1990) writes, what is needed is “[...] to break down the monopoly of privilege and power appropriated by the professionals and spread medical skills more broadly among various levels of health workers as well as health consciousness and awareness more effectively among common people.” (p. 2679)

According to the World Health Organization, 80% of the world population depends on indigenous therapies (Ernst & Fugh-Berman, 2002). One of the ways to collect evidence as well as to get information for the different healing aspects of herbs is to study the traditional forms of medicine and to preserve the traditional knowledge about herbs. Canada also has access to the rich traditions of native people, who still keep this knowledge, as Borins (1995) mentions in an article on native healing practices.

There is a need for more education and focus towards self-sufficiency in terms of prevention and treatment of simple cases of illness. This could be one of the means to more freedom from the present health care system and to a better health and well-being for all.

Literature Review

Experiential learning. *Experiential learning* has its roots in the desire for acknowledgement of the learning that happens through the meaning-making of personal experience as opposed to orthodoxy of the academic and scientific based, accredited learning. It is also seen as informal, non- formal or incidental learning that does not

necessarily happen in the classrooms and formal educational settings of institutions. There is a vast literature on experiential learning, and many definitions. Kolb (1984) defines it as follows: “the experience of joy and happiness” and “he had 20 years of experience on this job” (p. 34). Some researchers point out the ambiguity of the term, asking if it is possible at all to have adult learning that is not based on experience (Fenwick, 2001). Generalized also as “constructivism” this educational approach is described as “a humanistic, learner-centered practice that assists adult learners in reflecting on their experience in order to construct new knowledge” (Fenwick, p.17). It has many different forms of educational practice as well as different dimensions, depending on the focus – on a learner as a center of the process, on a reform or on liberation of individual and society. Kolb’s cycle of learning and Mezirow’s transformative learning theory (TLT) are some examples of experiential learning.

Kolb identifies learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). He points out the continuity of the process, grounded in experience, which requires resolution of conflicts in order to realize development. It has also a holistic nature – “it involves the integrated functioning of the total organism – thinking, feeling, perceiving, and behaving” (Kolb, 1984, p.31) and enables human adaptation to the world. Another important feature is that learning as a process involves transformation between the person and the environment (Kolb, 1984). The four stages of this process include the “concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation” (Kolb 1984, p. 40). At first, personal experience undergoes questioning through cognitive reflective observation.

Received answers result in conceptualization, which itself is being tested when applied in the new experience.

According to Kolb, the heart of human development, and its highest purpose, is integrity. He sees its function as a junction between the social knowledge and our dilemmas, which allows us not only to overcome difficulties but also later to give our share to the society in terms of new knowledge. Integrity and integrated judgment includes love, courage, justice and wisdom, and is characterized by its ability to combine the abstract ideas with the concrete conditions of the present moment in a person's life (Kolb, 1984). "The dawn of integrity", writes Kolb (1984), "comes with the acceptance of responsibility for the course of one's own life: For in taking responsibility for the world, we are given back the power to change it" (p. 230).

Transformative learning. Mezirow's (1991, 2000) Transformative Learning Theory has offered a different perspective to the meaning of adult education. The ten phases, as identified in research, describe the general pattern of the transformative process. Transformative learning differentiates between instrumental and communicative learning, the former seen as related to performance, effect-cause oriented and managing the outer world while the latter is based on understanding of meaning of both sides in communication. Mezirow also refers to it as a reconstructive theory, as "it seeks to establish a general, abstract, and idealized model that explains the generic structure, dimensions, and dynamics of the learning process" (Mezirow, Taylor, et al., 2009, p.21).

The process of transformation starts with a *disorienting dilemma*, a problem for which we cannot find a decision based on our present experience. It could be triggered by externally imposed life changes, like disease, divorce, failing at an important project; or

the process could start even from a discussion, a book, or from effort to understand a different culture whose elements are at odds with our already established, taken-for-granted, assumptions (Mezirow, 1991). “Any major challenge to an established perspective can result in transformation,” writes Mezirow (1991, p. 168). It happens when we critically reflect on what happened, on the process we have undertaken to find a solution, and most important, upon “the distorted premises sustaining our structure of expectation” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 167). It then could lead to transformation of a meaning perspective (Mezirow, 1991, p. 167), or *frame of reference* (Mezirow et al., 2009). He clarifies frames of reference as predisposed structures of assumptions which are the bases for our feelings and thoughts, and which help us to make meaning of people, experiences and events. In this way, transformative learning is “learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, and discriminating, reflective, open, and emotionally able to change” (Mezirow et al., 2009, p.22). He highlights the importance of critical reflection that leads to the process of changing, working on or learning new meaning schemes, ending in “an informed and reflective decision to act or not” (Mezirow et al., 2009, p.22). Another way to describe the transformative learning, offered by Mezirow, is as “epistemology of how adults learn to reason for themselves – advance and assess reasons for making a judgment [...]” (Mezirow et al, 2009, p.23).

In her research, Fenwick (2001) discusses some of the critics of constructivism, and of the Kolb and Mezirow theories in particular. They make their first point about perception of reflection as a cognitive process. Thus, it misses the role of other human impulses like desire, for example; tends to see the learning in binaries and separates subject from its environment. The second argument is about context, with its social,

cultural and political dimensions, whose importance is not acknowledged enough in both Kolb's and Mezirow's theories. Situative theorists argue against the almost mechanical separation of the person from the context. Similar separation, but of the experience from reflection, is criticized in Kolb's view of the experience as concrete (Fenwick, 2001).

Another argument of the critics concerns the presentation of the learner as separated self, main participant in understanding, which is purely a rational process (Fenwick, 2001). As Fenwick (2001) explains, it was challenged by many – situative, enactivist, poststructural, feminists and postmodern -perspectives, where the self is viewed as “multiple and shifts according the context”, or is an “illusory image” (p. 30). But the most troubling aspect is the “management” of experiential learning. The individual and unique experience “becomes normalised, standardized, then commodified and sold in the labor exchange relations defining capitalism” (Fenwick, 2001, p. 32). Fenwick (2001) describes how Experience turns into a “human capital”; and “adults are what they have done” (p. 31). Norms and organizations start regulating what counts in experience, and people try to fit, in order to get their experience acknowledged and useful to promote a job or to enter an institution. Thus, competitiveness between organizations to survive in the globalised world becomes a problem of learners, and places responsibility upon them, shows Fenwick (2001).

Experiential learning, focused on reflection, has enriched adult education by acknowledging and validating the place and importance of a multilayer human experience. At the same time, says Michelson (1999), we should not forget that “experience exceeds rational attempts to bound it, control, and rationalize it according to pre-existing social categories and sanctioned uses (as cited in Fenwick, p. 34).

In his review, Taylor (1997) summarizes a few factors of a more holistic interpretation of Transformative learning. One of these is affective learning, or learning that happens through our emotions and feelings. They are tightly connected to critical reflection and actually precede the rational process. The others, just to mention a few, are the place of the unconscious in revising meaning schemes; importance of relationships with their more subtle elements like trust, support, and friendship; and the role of context in the construction of knowledge. For example, Mezirow (2009) himself, in his latest publications also has reviewed the important role of imagination in the process of transformative learning.

This broadening of the meaning and scope of transformative learning has become even clearer in the last decade. Among the many examples where the theory is applied is the case of sustainability education (Lugg, 2007; Thomas, 2009). “The focus is on ethical engagement, the processes of critical analysis, and the use of holistic approaches” (Thomas, 2009, p.251).

Thomas (2009) acknowledges that sustainability education, by its nature, is transformative education, as students understand the need for supporting sustainable lifestyles and this understanding results in changed behavior. Another example of the rich possibilities of transformative learning to enhance sustainability education is given by Elizabeth Lange (2009). She writes that in our direct contact with the nature it

teach us of our embeddedness and where relationships are (re)membered. “Being” in these relationships, even momentarily, can prefigure a new way of daily being that heightens awareness of body and intuitive knowledge, foregrounding what is often only a background reality. This direct encounter challenges anthropocentric worldviews, initiates a growth in literacy about this ecological place, and catalyses glimmers of a new ethical sensibility towards the more-than-human world.

(Lange, p.201).

Service and volunteer learning. Learning is an important element of the volunteer experience. Research shows that motivation behind the decision to volunteer could be variable – from learning new skills and broadening opportunities for a new job, to more personal reasons as a desire to belong, to make friends, and to find a meaning and purpose in experience. But “learning is a crucial factor in volunteers’ satisfaction with their experience, and satisfied participants are more likely to remain committed to the organization” (Kerka, 1998, p.3).

Holland and Robinson (2008) write: “Service learning...combines service activities with academic learning objectives with the intent that the activity will benefit both the recipient and the provider” (p. 18). This interaction comes with the expectation that higher education has “moral and civic responsibilities, as well as intellectual reasons” and will contribute to the important issues of our world today. As Holland and Robinson (2008) observe, service learning “is most often and most effectively integrated into credit-bearing courses and are strongly linked to specific learning objectives” (p.19). They mention the research of Gellmon, Holland, and Shinnamon (1998), who examined surveys of students which revealed that they appreciate the practicality and relevance of community based learning and see it as transformative (Holland & Robinson, 2008, p. 21).

Sustainable education. UNESCO’s Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005 – 2014 (UNESCO, 2005), has put a special focus and new demands on the role of higher education worldwide. There are still arguments about different connotations of the terms *sustainability*, *sustainable development* and their interaction

with education, as *sustainable education*, *education for sustainability* (Duguid, Mündel and Schugurensky, 2007; Lugg, 2007; Thomas, 2009). The definition found in the Brundtland Report (1987) is the most adequate one in use today. Its focus is on the consequences of today's deeds of humanity for the future generations. Duguid et al. (2007) also bring a nuance as to how initiatives "support the agenda of corporate globalization or promote alternatives to it, recognizing that the current neo-liberal model of globalization results in ecological, social, and economic injustice" (p. 43).

Sustainability education becomes even more important for universities in Canada, as many of them also have signed the Tailloires Declaration of university leaders for a sustainable future – Concordia University is one of the signatories (ULSF, Signatory Institutions, 2012). As Beringer, Wright and Malone (2008) note with regard to sustainability in universities: "On many campuses, students are the driving force behind on-campus sustainable development and for pushing their perspective institutions toward improved sustainability performance" (p.55).

There is an important body of research examining difficulties that tertiary education meets when trying to apply sustainability in curriculum, pedagogy and practice. These difficulties include the necessity to re-think not only the content and process of learning, but also the role of organizations in each of their different aspects such as time, in terms of the continuous nature of the process and maybe of the highest importance, "changing political and social priorities" (Lugg, 2007, p. 99). The new approach requires that "this type of learning organization has embraced transformative learning... [and] it encompasses the notion of experiential learning, action learning as well as critical reflection" (Tilbury, Keogh, Leighton and Kent, 2005, as cited in Lugg, p.

99). Another particular focus that Lugg (2007) mentions is the importance of practical experience for the relation of cognitive and affective learning in participants, and also rising awareness for the connectedness of humans with nature. Thomas (2009) also acknowledges the strong connection between sustainable education and transformative learning and defines critical thinking as an important element. He argues that sustainable education “personalizes the learning experience in the context of a developing interest and a sense of responsibility toward the environment and society, producing a capacity for enacting change” (p. 254).

Volunteering in the area of sustainability provides students with many opportunities for experiential and transformative learning. As Duguid et al. (2007) draw attention to, in Canada, in particular, the tradition of sustainability could be traced to the heritage of indigenous people, and volunteering is one of the basic pillars of society. They also observe that, despite the presence of a rich experience in an important segment of the population, the literature on informal learning that happens during volunteering is still not extensive. Macduff (2005) and Miller (1998) argue that for an understanding of volunteer work in Canada, one should be aware of the economic and political context – budget cuts of 1990s and the transfer of many activities to the non-profit sector and volunteering (Cited in Duguid et al., 2007). They sum up what participants have learned and developed in relation to volunteering for sustainability values as “appreciating diversity and nurturing inclusiveness in deliberative and decision making processes,” take a holistic view and make important changes in their practices (Duguid et al., 2007, p.52).

Chapter Two: The Social Context

"You focus on the complexity within the case, on its uniqueness, and its linkages to the social context of which it is a part."
(Glesne, p. 22, 2011)

The context of my research consists of few different projects and few thematic streams that come together and create the richness and complexity of the situation. They are connected to herbs, sustainability, education and voluntarism and have triggered my interest to undertake this research. All together they contribute to the synergy of ideas that makes for a good learning premise. The context is ultimately connected with Concordia University and examines some of its settings.

The Greenhouse

Concordia Greenhouse is located on the roof of the University's Hall building on the downtown campus. The history of the Greenhouse is pivotal for the development of various projects oriented to sustainability and education through the years. It is well documented in the university's newspapers. The oldest article I found is dated October 14, 1966. Then, the Greenhouse is still news: "Would you believe it?" – it asks – "The Henry F' Hall Building has a GREEN HOUSE." ("The Green Leaves", 1966, p. S-15). The article explains the task of the new place as an additional tool to the University Biology courses which will help Biology students to better understand the life of plants. At that time, the article goes on, the Greenhouse had many separate sections where different types of plants were growing, and sections for experimental study for students and professors.

In the next few years, different articles follow the development of the Greenhouse and the slight changes in its role and objectives. That part of its history is closely connected with the life of its first technician, the horticulturalist Hervé de la Fouchardière, who worked there from the beginning until 1995 when he retired. In 1974 he grew a banana and a pineapple tree in the Greenhouse, together with 300 different species, including begonia, geranium, the special mimosa pudica, which reacted when touched, curling into a tight fist, and the carnivores, like pitcher plant and Venus fly trap. (Duguid-Chisholm, 1974, p. 5). Different sections of the Greenhouse have separate heat control and watering systems, in order to serve the plant species growing there. The article finishes with thoughts about the scientific view as a new way of understanding the flower – from its growth through adaptation and the pigmentation (p. 6). At this time the Green House still has a limited access, accommodating the research of Biology Professors and students.

Fourteen years later, in 1988, the Greenhouse was an important part of the university's research life “in the fields of Botany, Biochemistry, Microbiology, Plant Physiology, Anatomy and even Zoology” (Solomon-Bowden, 1988, p.30-31). The compartments of the Greenhouse were prepared to hold different types of plants, according to the temperature level at which they were kept, and the geographical region (Quebec). But now it opened its door, and the wider University community and the general public not only enjoyed viewing green-house products out-of-doors at the two campuses, but had access to the source itself every day; many people were coming just to buy plants – an initiative of the Technician that had started a few years ago and became ongoing.

In 2003, the Biology Department, including the Greenhouse, moved to their new facilities in Loyola campus. But it is not before 2005 as the new plan for the rejuvenation of the unused Greenhouse is set in motion. This time there are two distinctive differences in the vision of the green space: first is to “become innovative model for educational urban rooftop settings and a space for student and faculty-driven initiatives to be carried out in a sustainable manner”, and second – to serve projects “from fine arts to environmental biology, to organic agriculture”, as “a place for everyone to share skills and partake in collaborative learning”, as explained by the then coordinator for Sustainability Concordia, Elizabeth Whittaker (Larsen, 2005, p. 18).

The Greenhouse opened again in 2006, run by the Department of Geography, Planning and Environment and by Sustainable Concordia. At the beginning, the focus of its work was on composting, research and education related to sustainable horticulture. It started with 24-tonne composting system in the Greenhouse – again, a student-project aiming to transform the waste of the university kitchen and cafes with aid of worms into rich, organic soil for the gardens at Loyola campus. The Greenhouse accommodated external research, too, such as conditions for urban agriculture and vertical (on the walls) growth of plants. (Lafon, 2008, p.7). The same year students in Concordia voted to donate 25 cents per-credit fee levy to a fund-raising campaign (Sustainability Action Fund 1% Campaign). It helped in the realization of some sustainability projects later in 2007, like ensuring the Greenhouse coordinator position, organizing the Sustainable Business conference, implementing the R4 composting facility at Loyola, etc., (Herald, 2007, p. 9). The same year is launched the Greenhouse Atrium Project. Huge wooden

crates are placed, in order to grow fruit trees, medicinal herbs and native species (Sky high atrium, 2009, p. 7).

During the next few years, despite some setbacks due to the lack of regular funding, the Greenhouse continues to develop to become an “all-organic space, education facility and a community-building centre”, helped by the staff and voluntary work of many students. (Smith, 2008). One of the initiatives is growing tea, which is then dried and served to visitors. In 2010 starts The 4 seasons Growing Project, whose goal is to combine food security and education and which is one of the activities meant to revive the Greenhouse. The team has experimented also with mushrooms, tomatoes, peppers and pumpkins. There are about 50 volunteers going to the greenhouse on a weekly basis, who help with sprouts, composting, planting seeds and drying herbs. But as the community involvement is important part of the Project, workshops about mushroom’ growing are provided and became very popular (Akerman, 2011). In 2011, The Greenhouse extends its activity by establishing the “City Farm School”. In 2012, the Greenhouse is an “all-organic space geared towards education and research into urban sustainability, community building and food security” (Concordia Greenhouse Project, 2012).

Le Frigo Vert (LFV)

LFV is one of the oldest student-run initiatives connected with food. Its first add is found in “The Link”, informing students of the presence of “Concordia’s non-profit, student-run natural food store”, where one can “buy inexpensive health foods, great sandwiches, and yummy baked goods right on campus!” (Le Frigo Vert, 1996). In the following month’s edition there is more information on the specifics of the store, like, for example, its development from the Concordia members of Quebec Public Interest

Research Group (QPIRG) food project and their intention to provide healthy, organic food at reasonable prices to students on the campus (Lampert, 1996). The article follows the history before opening and explains the reasons behind its delay. It was in 1994 when students voted on a referendum that 1.70 \$ levy per semester would go to LFV, but the money actually was received in 1995. After the referendum, the new project had to pass through the approval of the Board of Governors in Concordia. From the beginning LFV started as a volunteer-run organization, a fact that also presented some challenges regarding the high staff turn-over, resulted in different people meeting with faculty during development of the project (p. 8). More details were found in “Concordia’s Thursday Report” of 15 February 1996. “The first of its kind in Canada, it [Le Frigo Vert] hopes to not only sell food, but to educate customers about good food politics” (Moscovitch, 1996).

The education provided includes workshops on different food-related topics, dietary information for HIV-positive people, baking bread and starting a worm-composter (p. 11). Other details relate to clarifying the initial idea development of QPIRG, where several members have decided to research food issues in depth, including different trade agreements and their effect on the choice we make for food, as well as the quality of the food on our table in terms of pesticides. They make a group and plan to go and buy directly from the local wholesalers, and to open a store in the downtown campus (p. 11). The principle of the membership in Le Frigo Vert is explained as automatic membership for undergrad students, and a 10\$ for a lifetime membership fee for the rest, but only if affordable (p. 11). As mentioned, the next step of Le Frigo will be to move to student ownership as co-operative.

In 1997, LFV employs eight students, three of them on a full-time position. Amongst its materials is an HIV pamphlet which explains how to boost the immune system through natural foods (Paré, 1997). It also provides education on biotechnology, pesticides and basic food issues, like cheesecake workshop which responds to today's body images that result in dieting and affect our body image, says the then Frigo coordinator Phil Ilijevski (p.12). Another interesting aspect of the knowledge that Le Frigo hopes to disseminate is the link between grain-based diet, the number of people that can be fed, and vegetarianism, discussing the social aspects of meat eating (p. 12). This topic of vegetarianism, veganism and, in general, socially more aware food consumers slowly take its place in the concepts and activity of LFV. People that buy there are interested in the quality of the food they choose, or in the environment and sustainability. "We want people to know why we buy the things we do [...] we're committed to environmental and social justice issues in the food choices we offer," says Zev Tiefenbach, Le Frigo Vert Educational coordinator at that time (Silverman, 1997). That is why Le Frigo offers educational resources on different issues concerning society and nature, which affect people's health. Some of them include organic food and fair-trade grown food, in the form of locally produced fruits and vegetables. Mark-ups are lower compared to the rest of natural food stores. The running and supply of the store are done by two different, elected bodies of Concordia students, helped by volunteers.

Le Frigo's idea to become a collective became a fact in April 2001, when students voted at the annual general meeting. It resulted in the approval of a new constitution and the election of a new board of directors. (Biberstein, 2001). The growth of a complex and innovative organization like Le Frigo Vert inevitably passes through setbacks and

internal controversies. Its staff complained “of top-down leadership, low presence on campus and overemphasis on profit” under the previous Board, which, from its side, were saying that they (the staff) “wanted to do everything themselves” and “didn’t want any input from the Board” (p. 4). In addition to turning the Frigo Vert into a collective, there was another important change voted at the same meeting in 2001. The new Board of directors was also to serve as a Board for the People’s Potato, combining both services. The change in the direction of a merge was led by Zev Tiefenbach, at this time a Coordinator of the People’s Potato (p.4).

The challenges to LFV continue in the following years. This time it is about space and the rent. At first the landlord of the place wants them and the other organization with which they share the space (QPIRG) to leave; then he changes his mind and allows Le Frigo to stay, but under a condition – to be responsible for the whole rent, which means that they should pay more, three times more per month (van Drimmelen, 2003). At the same year, the funding coming to Le Frigo from university is decreased from 18000 to 3000 a year (p. 1). This was the money that the co-op used for providing different workshops in cooperation with the People’s Potato. The anticipated networking with the Concordia Student Union Council did not happen, too. As a result, due to financial difficulties, the Co-op had to cut its staff by 20% and to depend more and more on volunteers (p. 1). With a hope to increase the income, Le Frigo starts another initiative – a café and a place to students to meet and chat over a cup of fair trade coffee.

Concordia’s non-profit food co-operative managed to survive. In 2004 the students in Concordia voted to change the levy – from 1.70 \$ per semester to 0.25\$ per credit, which helped Le Frigo to stay open. The Link in 2007 again acknowledged its

uniqueness - a non-profit, health-food co-operative, owned by students, which looked on the food not only from nutritional, but from a political point of view (Smith, 2007). On its 15th anniversary in 2007 LFV is active, offering literature on the genetically-modified organisms, organizing film nights, visits to the local farms, protests and opening to the greater public.

In 2012, when I started collecting information on different projects that create the context of my research, LFV website describes it as: “a local non-profit, collectively run, natural and organic health food cooperative” (Le Frigo Vert, 2012), which aim is not only to offer healthy food, “good for our bodies and our communities” (About Le Frigo Vert, 2012), but also to promote anti-oppression and anti-discriminatory politics. It keeps providing opportunities for volunteering and for learning about nutritious food, alternative ways of health care, and combating injustice through workshops and different initiatives.

The People’s Potato

The People’s Potato is a project founded in 1999 in order to address student poverty. It starts as a student-run soup kitchen in the University, the idea, initiated by Zev Tiefenbach. “The Link” of January 11, 2000 announced:

A remarkable thing happened yesterday afternoon in Reggie’s basement. Over fresh food and blaring music, students created a community atmosphere, providing a unique approach to the growing problem of student hunger. It was the first day of People’s Potato – an example of what happens when students identify a need, and work together to provide a grassroots solution.

(p.6, Editorial/”From potatoes”)

Further, in another article in this issue, more of the philosophy of the Food collective is presented, and its holistic approach, which makes the link between the access to food and human development. The aim of the students is to create an egalitarian

place when everybody will have access to food, and to address problems of student poverty and hunger (Zucca, 2000).

The moving power behind the project is again the students. They decided 0.05\$ per credit levy to go to the food collective and managed to convince the University administration to have a kitchen space on the territory of the downtown campus. At the beginning, People's Potato cooks in a basement of a church, and then the food is moved a few blocks away to the Hall Building. Every day between 200 and 400 students have their lunch in the Reggies' basement. When they start preparing food in the kitchen on the 7th floor, it should be taken down every time by elevators. These first months are also months of planning the needed equipment, like an industrial oven, and calculating the budget. The food collective will rely on the per-credit levy voted by students, as well as on the help by Student Services. Grant applications are considered, too (Savoie, 2000).

It is in the first year, in 2000, when People's Potato decides to decrease expenses and become more self-sufficient. They contact the Vice-Rector Services and ask for a place at Loyola campus for starting a garden, in order to grow their own "potatoes, garlic, onions carrots and legumes" (Horn, 2000).

The cuisine of People's Potato is vegetarian, even vegan, and continues to serve students through the years. In 2002 they already have their own cookbook, "*Vegan on a Shoestring*". Its purpose is to educate students both on the vegan lifestyle as well as on the preparation of the vegan meals. As presented in "The Link" newspaper, the cookbook starts with explanation why the food actually is political, including unfair prices, exploitation, but also questions raised by meat production, as morality, health (i.e., animals are given hormones and antibiotics) and environment (i.e., cattle need more land

and food). There are recipes for soups, salads and baked goods. The article offers a recipe for a Spicy Apple Soup from the cookbook, and shows a picture how the crop is harvested from the Potato garden in Loyola campus, where they grow vegetables and herbs for the kitchen (Baril, 2002).

Together with information on different basic food products, on page 35 in the cookbook is found a paragraph about the usage of herbs

“Herbs: A basic herb supply includes familiar dried basil and oregano, as well as thyme, rosemary, dill and mint. When available, fresh basil, parsley, dill and coriander do wonders for food. Herbs can be bought in bulk and stored in jars to be economical”. (p. 35, *Vegan on a Shoestring*)

Herbs are included in the different meals, dressings and soups’ recipes. People’s Potato tries to supply regularly fresh herbs, as also mentioned in the book’s introduction (p. 2). “Not only can cooking be fun, it is a process of life-long learning”, says Zev Tielenbach in Introduction of the cookbook (p. 2), referring to their constant search for new recipes and the input of the different communities that share passion and care about food.

At present the People’s Potato are tending their garden at the Loyola campus – their summer project. The garden of People’s Potato is open to volunteers and relies on volunteering. Exploration of different ideas and initiatives is welcomed. Its goal is „to provide a space that encourages volunteer participation while providing community members with access to fresh and organic vegetables” (“The People’s Potato Community Garden”, web site, 2015).

In 2012, the People’s Potato and Le Frigo Vert projects are connected to, and work in, the context of the Concordia Greenhouse Project.

Concordia's Health Services Newsletter

From 2004 to 2012 on the website of Concordia Health Services there is a section called “Health Notes Newsletter”. On a monthly basis it offers a few rubrics that give detailed information or address issues which can help us trace our path to a better health. In every issue, the readers can also find a recipe for a delicious meal or a salad, which is in tune with a preoccupation with healthy nutrition.

Again in the website from that period, two years ago, there was a link to the site of HerbMed by American Botanical Council, which provided access to information and scientific research on 20 common herbs. The other herbs were accessible through the professional database (with subscription and licensing). The link does not exist now.

At present, the printed newsletter of Health Services provides on a double-sided sheet a short, but concise guide to herbs, based on their culinary usage. It qualifies herbs as the “fresh or dried leaves of a plant”, in order to differentiate them from spices, which are “made from the other parts of the plant that are aromatic (have a pleasant aroma) such as the buds, fruit, berries or bark”. Herbs and spices are referred to as flavoring foods, and helping to establish a more healthy diet (having less fat and sugar). The ethnic preferences and the storage of herbs are explained, too. To find herbs one can either buy them, or can start their own mini herb garden at home, or at windowsill. More information is provided on how to dry herbs, together with an internet site (on growing and drying). On the back side there is a guide on most popular herbs and spices, with explanation, description of the flavor and suggested uses (Health Services Newsletter, 2012).

Loyola Farm, the Herb Garden and the City Farm School

Concordia University was formed in 1974, when Loyola College merged with Sir George William University. The history of Loyola College dates back to 19th century, when the Order of Jesuits opened it in 1896. Since then, the College was looking for a permanent site. In 1900, it purchased the Decary farm which was 50 acres (Slattery, 1962). It was a few miles away from Montreal, on the west. The Farm was “producing vegetables, hay, apples and melons”, and was “shipping their famous melons almost everywhere, with high recommendations from the largest hotels of New York. Sometimes these melons were grown in patches of 15 rows with as many as 400 melons to a row [...]” (Slattery, 1962, p.134).

As Slattery describes it in his book, with sense of humor and picturesque style, later, when Sherbrooke Street was finally prolonged to the western part of Montreal, “it cut right through the heart of Loyola’s melon patch” (p. 134). Construction of the campus started in 1913, and by 1916 the college moved from Drummond Street to the new premises (Loyola is straight from central casting, 1997). There are many chronologies and articles describing the step-by-step planning and building of Concordia university and Loyola campus through the years; although there are not many records on the state of the farm after the construction of the Sherbrooke street extension. It seems that it was not used for farming before year 2000, when the student activist Zev Tielenbach discusses with the University the creation of an organic farm of one-third of 3 000 square meters “at Loyola’s athletic fields” (Monahan, 2000). Tielenbach explains further that the garden is seen as investment for the next few years, and that the aim will be to sell the harvest and thus to fund the People’s Potato soup kitchen and to self-sustain the garden. The maintenance operations of the university are going to fence and

landscape the place, which as it can be seen from the pictures, at that time is vast and covered with grass; while the Student Union will be running the garden. “Student volunteers will be taught the subtleties of garden maintenance by Dan Warren, an organic farmer from Nova Scotia who was hired on contract for the summer by the Concordia Food Collective (Monahan, 2000). This is how the beginning of the Loyola new garden’s revival has started. In 2008, in the blog of The People’s Potato one can find a small advertisement about their Garden planting party, where everybody can come to plant seeds and seedlings and to prepare their garden at Loyola for the coming season (Lise, 2008).

The next development happens in 2010 with the new “Concordia Food Systems” Project, which creates a tea and herb garden at Loyola campus. By the following year the garden is already a fact.

At the beginning of March 2011, Concordia initiated its “The Moving Forward” project, where the academics and community meet to discuss the sustainable food movement in Montreal. As Karen Herland in the “Concordia University Journal” defines it earlier in February, “Moving Forward” is the precursor to the City Farm School (CFS), a week-long practical project that will teach community members, educators, volunteers and facilitators the basics of agriculture in small, urban spaces” (2011). The interaction between students and community brings mutual benefits: “CFS is practicing experience-based models of education and exercising principles of social responsibility and community engagement” (Thoroness, as cited by Herland, 2011).

The next development of the CFS could be traced in the Concordia University Journal as of May 2, 2011. Each City Farm School session lasted one week. In the

morning, the theory is explained by lectures, in both French and English; in the afternoon, there is more hands-on oriented, practical work. The first graduates are forty people and they receive internship with different community groups.

The Greenhouse' activity is oriented towards community outreach, workshops development and answering questions about food production and distribution – in the city and outside. The number of volunteers who want to be involved is amazing– more than 500 people. Events such as “Sustainable Food Festival”, held the previous year, open the door to sustainability in food production, living and experience for many people involved in the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF). As Kim Fox, the Administrator of events at the Greenhouse summarizes it: “People want to learn how to garden again. They want to learn how to cook, how to grow their own food, and to understand the politics around food. Why not have gardens in the city?” (Fox, as cited by Akerman, 2 May, 2011, p.4).

In 2013 two new streams of education are launched at the CFS. One of them is “Medicinal herbs” – an Internship program of which the main site is the herb garden at Loyola Farm. Participants plant new herbs in the garden which “[...] boasts many varieties of medicinal and culinary herbs. These herbs are harvested and dried right on site, and can be purchased at Le Frigo Vert or tasted in the Concordia Greenhouse Tea Atrium” (Loyola Gardens, 2014).

At present, the goal of the CFS is to “facilitate education through an experience-based model”, involving students and community in mutual work, and addressing the “growing interest in issues around food sovereignty and the practice of urban agriculture (Our History, 2014, para 4).

Sustainable Concordia Project (SCP)

SCP is a student initiated project which started in 2002 and developed rapidly. Today, it coordinates many different activities and is carried forward through the work of many student-volunteers. Sustainable Concordia relies on the multi-stakeholders' approach, unifying efforts not only of students, but also of staff, faculty, community, etc. (About us, 2015, para 6). It views sustainability as a process that links the social, economic, environmental and that takes care of our footprint on Earth (para 1). The mission of the organization describes its belief "that universities have a crucial role to play in developing an ecologically aware, socially just, and economically responsible society" (para 3). Their role is envisioned as being a hub for development and testing of ideas, as well as being an agent of the change in the society, based on wide participation and transparency (para 2).

It begins with the idea of the BA student Geneva Guerin. She has attended the UN World Summit on Sustainable development in 2002, where she learned about this type of activity at other universities, as presented in "Concordia University magazine" (Gedeon, 2007 p. 10). Guerin summarizes: "Sustainability is so much more than just about the environment. It's about creating healthy societies and economies that are respectful of ecological limitations". (Guerin, as cited by Gedeon, p. 10).

A year later, in 2003, the SCP publishes its first campus Sustainability assessment (SCP, "Concordia campus sustainability assessment 2003 executive summaries"). For my research I study the first two Assessment reports of SCP, as they are both important and interesting as evidence of beginning and directions of development of this essential project.

In the Mission statement the Project is described as a “student-driven initiative supported by university-wide participation” (SCP, 2003), whose objective is “to make Concordia University more ecologically, economically and socially sustainable” (SCP, 2003, Mission statement). It focuses on the engagement of students, staff and administration and on creating links between different units. The CSP describes the short-term and the long-term goals as respectfully to produce a campus sustainability assessment and based on this, to develop further implementation strategies for the audit recommendations.

Another long-term goal is to keep the assessment going in order to have a Report every second year, so that the state of sustainability of Concordia University is measured and monitored. In the section devoted to Major Players and Organization, the Mission states that “campus is simultaneously a microcosm reflection of, and directly connected to, larger social, economic, ecological and political systems” (SCP, 2003, Mission statement). Under “sustainability” the CSP accepts the definition in the Brundtland Report (1987), and internationally used three-pillar approach it recommends: Sustainable ecological integrity, sustainable economic prosperity and sustainable social equity. Further, it highlights the responsibility for universities to lead by example when a change is needed (CSP, 2003, Introduction/Sustainability).

When evaluating the food in the University, the Report acknowledges that, despite the number of food providers available, only Le Frigo Vert and The People’s Potato “cater to all the different food distinctions, providing vegan, kosher and halal food options”, as well as they “give back to the community as educators, in attending and

supporting community events, and in their active role in addressing social, economic and ecological issues” (CSP, assessment 2003, Health & Wellbeing/Food).

Health Services in the University are also assessed. The report points out that since its beginning in 1970, Health Services provide not only clinical help, but also education, through the work of the Health educator and different initiatives, activities and materials, like the Health Notes, pamphlets series, presentations and a library (CSP, 2003, Health & Wellbeing/Health Services). In the recommendations regarding Health Services, under classification “Innovative”, we read the following: “Access to alternative health care practitioners on campus (homeopaths, naturopaths, holistic health practitioners, acupuncture, etc.)”.

“Sustainable Concordia executive summaries assessment 2006” lists the achievements of the Project in the first four years and highlights the strong support that sustainability has received on campus. It focuses again on the importance of education in universities for preparing the future agents of social change, on links that sustainability goals make between different departments and people, on community-building and common values shared (CSP, 2006, p.9 and 10). They all lead to creating an “inclusive society”, and contribute to improving the “holistic health”. It is “Because our societal values and attitudes affect the way we perceive and interact with the natural environment, the health of our communities, and nature are completely intertwined”.

(Elwell, as cited in CSP, 2006, p.16)

The report also acknowledges that Concordia has been “the most energy efficient university for 9 years in a row” (p.19), and summarizes the most important projects. Like R4 Concordia (Rethink, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle), which through innovation has

managed to save money, to contribute to decreasing the waste and pollution and produced healthy soil for the gardens and the Greenhouse (p.21). Among the important improvements is mentioned the recovery of the Greenhouse, made with the help of Sustainable Concordia and The People's Potato (p.55)

The first Sustainability Co-coordinator becomes Melissa Garcia Lamarka in June 2004. The following year, in 2005, students vote to pay five cents per credit for the Sustainable Concordia Students group. The amount is used to serve different students' projects on sustainability, as well as to pay few students to work part-time in order to monitor some of the projects (Gedeon, 2007, p. 10). Gradually, Sustainable Concordia turns into a moving force for the different sustainability projects in Concordia, which involve: waste, recycling, food, water, green spaces, and much more. One year later they vote to pay 25 cents per credit to the 1% campaign of the Sustainability action fund, in order to ensure money for the green projects - like sustainable Business conference, and the composting facility at Loyola (Herland, 2007, p. 9).

Concordia Food Systems Project (CFS Project)

The CFS was established by a few faculty members and students, in cooperation with on-campus and external partners. Some of them are Sustainable Concordia, The Greenhouse Project, the People's Potato, etc. Its website explains the importance of food systems in our life, and the challenges they face nowadays, from production to consumption, as well as the main question that it need to answer about food security and food sustainability. Its mission aims to bring "together students, faculty and staff to facilitate a transition to a more sustainable food system for all" (CFS Project, Mission, 2010). One of the projects is called "The RealITEA", which plans to create, together with

partners a tea garden at Loyola campus where through discussions, workshops and horticultural education people will understand what is behind the tea production and distribution. An article in “The Link” from November 2010 describes some of the plants in the garden: “Silver Absinthe, Leopard Lilly, Peppermint”, but also “medicinal herbs like Lemon Balm and Jacob’s Ladder”. In the words of Lennard Fruehling, one of developers of the RealiTEA garden who, together with his colleague, undertook an applied researched internship,

We grow and harvest the herbs here, while creating dialogue and education around the permaculture processes, then we dry them and then sell them at The Hive. Whatever revenue we make goes back to in the garden and we do seed saving for the next season. It’s a student driven, social economy project”
(as cited in Beeston, 2010, p.7).

But, which is even more important, on the site of the Project there is information provided that the RealiTEA garden is only a step in a long process, of which the goal is “...to create a Farm Incubation program at Loyola. Farm incubation programs provide basic farming education to individuals interested in starting their own farms” (CFS Project, Initiatives, 2010).

The Motherhouse of the Grey Nuns

The historic Grey Nuns’ Motherhouse acquisition became reality on June 1, 2004. The newspapers published extensive articles about the history of the Motherhouse and looked for links between the continuity and the mission of Concordia. In “The Gazette”, Peggy Curran, The Montreal Gazette’s universities reporter, noticed:

Concordia University’s commitment to accessibility to all ages and backgrounds forms a natural alliance with the Grey Nuns. It honors the mission of St. Marguerite d’Youville – a woman who opened her arms to all, regardless of gender, race, or religious beliefs”. (Curran, 2004, p. A1)

Sister Larkin, Superior General of the Sisters of Charity, also says: “It made sense from an educational, cultural and historical perspective” (as cited by Curran, 2004, p.A2). As she adds, Concordia has been their neighbor for many years, and the Nuns did not even consider discussing the Motherhouse with any other interested institution.

“The Sisters of Charity” (the Grey Nuns) were founded in 1737 by Marguerite d'Youville and three of her companions, who decided to provide shelter and care for people in need in Montreal. (Sisters of Charity, 2003). Despite all difficulties, Marguerite always stayed true to her ideal for charity regardless of culture, gender and social standing of people. Later, Marguerite was called by the Pope “Mother of Universal Charity” (para.6).

From the very beginning, the activity of Marguerite d'Youville has been based on voluntarism, acceptance and care. The “Canadian Illustrated News” writes in 1875 that, starting from 1747, “1,490 poor and infirm men, 3,240 women, 1,914 orphans and 19,472 foundlings” have been taken care in the General Hospital of the Grey Nuns (as cited by Martin, 1999, p.40). There are many other organizations that found place in the Motherhouse, both in its earlier and more recent history. In the 20th century there were an orphanage, a school, a shelter, a hospital, to name just a few (Curran, 2004, pA2). After the acquisition, Concordia University intends to accommodate at the Mother House the faculty of Fine Arts in 2022, when the Grey Nuns vacate the building. As they did it nine years in advance, University decides to renovate it and turn it into a student residence. Now it offers beds for 600 students, who could live and study there in the atmosphere where history and modernity beautifully meet each other (Sidaway, 2014).

Volunteering at Concordia

All of the students' projects like The Greenhouse, The City Farm School, People's Potato, etc., rely to a different extent but firmly, on the ideas and hands of volunteers. It was interesting to learn more about the history of volunteering and to see if and when it became better organized and efficient.

In 2007, Howard Bokser writes in the Editor's Voice section of Concordia University Magazine about the Voluntary service. It acknowledges the essential role of volunteers for the life of the University, and makes an interesting link with the tradition of the two main "branches" that have formed Concordia – the Loyola College and the Sir George Williams University.

At Loyola College, the Jesuits and other faculty members explicitly taught their students to be "a man for others" (they were mostly men). At Sir George, as several of this issues letters point out, Henry F. Hall, together with a long list of professors like Douglas B. Clarke, Francelia Butler and Neil Compton, embodied the same concept.

(Bokser, 2007, p.3)

He acknowledges that today's professors and students understand and follow the same value pattern, caring not only for the immediate families, but also for the community, viewed as our extended family.

In 2008, in the Concordia "Journal" there is an article speaking about the Association of Alms in Concordia and its activity for matching the students who want to volunteer with external organizations needing help. As its President Eileen Wong is cited, "given our school's reputation for grass-roots community work, it is important to increase our involvement at the community level." (as cited by Herland, 2008). Further, Wong shares their idea to start a program for the international students and immigrants, as volunteering has an important role in the integration of immigrants to the Canadian

society. Some of the other ideas are to have out-of-town volunteering weekends, to be able to act in case of emergency with the needed training, and to involve more faculty in their activities (Herland, 2008).

The same year, 2008, Valerie Millet receives the support from the University President, and together with the Dean of Students' Office, university staff and different students' groups establishes the Volunteer Initiative Committee in Concordia (Curtis, 2010, p.04). As she says, it is her way to show students "the diversity of volunteering opportunities at Concordia, in Montreal and abroad" (Millette, as cited by Curtis, 2010, p.4). The article also focuses on the special help that volunteers will receive from the university – "Concordia is the first university in Quebec to recognize the work of student-volunteers. Through the co-curricular record, students will have an official document describing the activities they participated in throughout their university careers" (p.04).

Concordia's Leadership Initiative and Volunteer Engagement (LIVE) Centre is opened in August 2010. It provides a more organized and central approach to volunteering and facilitates students looking for information about internal and external opportunities to volunteer. The participating students will gain a real experience in different settings during their academic studies. In December of the same year, the "Journal" gives additional information on the importance and the work of the Centre, focusing on its alignment with the university commitment to community, as well as the recognition of the volunteer work through the CCR (Co-Curriculum Record). It presents the initiative of Valery Millette, the LIVE Centre Coordinator, who, together with the Concordia University Initiative committee, makes Concordia Volunteer Awareness Week into one month event with many activities. Student response is amazing – for the month

of October, there are 1000 students who participate both in workshops and activities. (Cooper, 2010, p.6).

In the following years, the LIVE Centre finds its place in the life of the university and provides many students with information and support – during its drop-in hours, events like Volunteer Awareness Week, regular workshops for students and other events. In order to focus students' attention on all the benefits and opportunities that volunteering offers, it conceptualizes the “strategic volunteering” – the one that acknowledges the process of exchange and receiving of valuable work experience, building necessary skills and a network. The time, skills and effort of the students, staff and faculty who volunteer are recognized each year through Volunteer Awards. (Strategic volunteering, 2015).

Volunteerism in Canada could be viewed as an essential tradition in the development of the society and state. Each year, 12.5 million people volunteer, giving 2.1 billion hours of their time (Statistics Canada, 2009). It is also important to note that Concordia is the first university in Quebec to introduce a co-curriculum record to keep track of voluntary engagement and thus it recognises volunteer and leadership activities to complement academic transcripts. As explained by the Dean of the Students Andrew Woodall “it is also about creating well-rounded students who possess degrees with added value” (Charlebois, 2011, para 1). Credits given for volunteering actually are for acknowledging learning through volunteer engagement, and thus underlining its experiential nature (Eyler, 2009).

Chapter Three: Methodology and Presentation of Data

In this chapter I describe the chosen methodology of my research and its step-by-step implementation. As the purpose of my research is to analyze the learning and motivation of Concordia's students who grow herbs at the Loyola garden and at the Greenhouse, I have used a qualitative approach. In the course of the study I used a three-pronged methodology, of which the main elements were: the documentary research in the archives of Concordia; the narratives of students who were volunteering for the Greenhouse or participated in the Internship program about herbs at Loyola Farm; and my personal experience in the herb garden of the Loyola campus. I then present the profiles of the volunteer participants based on the interviews I conducted with them following a semi-structured schedule I used (See Appendix A).

Data collection

Documentary research in the archives of Concordia and related publications.

Starting from the beginning of my research project in 2012 and early 2013, I traced in the archives of Concordia and the university newspapers and reports information describing the implementation and the development of the few projects that constitute the context of my research. These are the Greenhouse, City Farm School, Sustainable Concordia, People's Potato, Le Frigo Vert, Concordia Food systems, the Health Newspaper of Health Services, volunteering at Concordia and the Grey Nuns Mother House. What I try to trace is the string followed by the herbs through these different settings, together with volunteering, and how traditions overlap, shaping up the specific

context of Concordia, where my interviewees study and work. My findings are summarized in a chapter under the name “Context”.

Semi-structured interview schedule to conduct one on one interviews with volunteer participants. The semi-structured interviews with the students growing herbs constitute my second source of information and research, though my first research-plan idea had to undergo a change. The questions are intended to make participants reflect on their reasons to volunteer and to work with herbs; their prior experiences with herbs; their practices now; their grasp of sustainability in relation to herbs (if any), etc. (Appendix A).

My first plan was to interview some student-volunteers who help at the Greenhouse and the Loyola garden, mainly working with herbs. When I started this project, I had no previous experience with the qualitative research and interviews. During its development I had to make some changes and to adapt to new conditions or challenges of reality that required adjustments and modifications to the original plan I had prepared. For example, my idea was to choose the interview participants through a short questionnaire – a purposive sampling. I thought that it could give me the opportunity to choose students from different programs, and thus, with different interests, with different gender and experience in volunteering, so that at the end I could create a base, offering the varied experiences which reflect the richness of the real life of the actual programs. From this base I expected to choose the final participants that would fit the criteria for my semi-structured interviews. The first step was to make a brief description of my project, and to send it, together with the Purposive sampling interview questions, to the Coordinators in the Greenhouse and in the Loyola garden and to ask them to spread the word among students who volunteer there.

My intentions were altered many times when confronted with the reality of the context. At first, my goal was to reach the students working especially with herbs – and it appeared that most of them were working with vegetables and a few of them with herbs. Second, it became clear that it is not so easy to find students who volunteer on a regular basis, and who have worked the whole cycle from planting to growth of the herbs; for example, from the early spring and seeds, to the harvest. I had not thought beforehand that in my design, a full-cycle experience with the plants will be required, if I expected the participants to speak about what they have seen, done, learned and felt while working with herbs. It would not be possible to research what students have learned by growing herbs, if they were at the site for a couple of hours or days, even for a month or two. Growing herbs is a longer process in terms of time requirements. This was an important feedback and opinion that I got from the co-coordinators at Loyola garden. Third, when I sent the purposive sampling questions to the coordinators, they re-sent them to the students – and days and weeks went by with no answer. Finally, after repeating this process twice, I realized that I might not be able to collect enough answers so that I can choose a diversified sample of participants – and will have to accept to work with students who were willing to participate, if any of them responded positively.

At that stage of my research I underestimated the real and direct contact needed with people. I was also shy and not sure how to proceed. These could have been some of the reasons for not getting responses, on top of the difficulty of actually finding people who had tended to herb gardens and herbs in general over a long period. Finally, with the great help and with the courtesy of coordinators, I was approached by two student-volunteers who later agreed to participate.

Meanwhile, when I was waiting for some responses, the coordinators told me that there is a new internship program that will start in Concordia, in the Loyola herb garden, focused on the medicinal usage of herbs. They offered me to go and speak with students there, so I can find participants for my interviews. My concern was that they are not exactly student – volunteers, which was my idea at the beginning. But, as the time was passing and I was not sure if I would find student-volunteers to interview, finally I decided to take this chance. I felt that this was a rare chance - a brand new project, connected only with herbs, lasting months and requiring the constant presence on the spot of the Internship's participants.

It was early in March 2013 when the Internship started with workshops in the Greenhouse, based on seedlings' preparation. Later, in May, the main work moved to the Loyola herb garden. Then I asked if I could come to present my research to the internship students, and after the positive answer, I met with the students during one of their theoretical classes. Waiting again for responses I realized the need for creating better rapport with my future interviewees. It was when I started meeting the real people and working with them on a weekly basis (from the end of May 2013, through June, July and August) at the garden, when I overcame my natural shyness and learned how to approach them, that they responded and agreed to be interviewed.

As the Program was about qualities and usage of herbs, the motivation of participants was really strong. During the days that I spent with them transplanting nettles, weeding, planting or harvesting and drying herbs, I had interesting conversations, which helped me to get to know their personalities better. And we all shared the same interest in herbs, which had its positive and negative aspects regarding my research. For

example, it helped us to somehow speak the same language and understand each other, freely discuss intellectual and emotional concerns, which was very good; at the same time, being very much interested in this topic, and having some previous knowledge, opinions and beliefs made my observation more difficult, because it took me lots of effort just to listen, and not to react, not to judge and not to make everything fit into my categories.

I was also invited to visit one of their theory classes, and to participate in the practical lessons on transformation of herbs, so that I could get a better idea of their Program. One of its goals was to increase the number of herbs by planting more varieties. I learned for the first time about some plants that are native and typical to North America, like black and blue cohosh. It was also interesting for me to compare different usage of the same herbs – as taught in the Internship program, and as popular in my country of origin.

The garden during the summer was diverse, colorful and aromatic, but also – tended and full of life. I remembered my first visit there, in the early spring of the previous year (2012). Most of the herbs were there, but the garden looked as if there were not many people interested in them. And at that time I did not know yet about the new project of the Greenhouse called City Farm School. The new concepts have been born, and then quickly put into motion in practice, examining, answering and anticipating the needs of the students and community.

The word “school” explained well the role of the City Farm at Loyola campus and showed where the focus is. From the point of view of my subject, this change was very important, as it intended to connect directly growing herbs with education (and

growing vegetables, and other Farm activities, too). The Coordinators shared in their interviews, their intention to bring the expertise and knowledge out to the larger community; to teach a greater number of people the way to grow their fruits and herbs.

Such a thorough and extensive program – starting with planning, planting seeds, taking care of plants, studying their qualities and different ways herbs could be used, until harvesting and “transformation” of the plants to tinctures or oils – took about six months, from early spring to late summer and required weekly involvement of all students enrolled. The Program had two parts – educational, consisting of workshops with theory oriented and hands-on elements, and internship – shift work in the Greenhouse and the Loyola herb garden.

The interviews took place from 29 May 2013 to 26 September 2013. All together they were seven – two with Co-coordinators of the Loyola garden and the Greenhouse (at that time), three with participants in the Internship program (Emma, Zöe, Geena), and two with students volunteers who worked with herbs at the Greenhouse (Katherine and Ray). There were many people from different communities in Montreal, who also took the Internship, but I was approached for interview only from present Concordia students or those who had already finished their studies not so long ago.

The interviews with the Co-coordinators included the same questions as for the rest of participants, plus some more on their role and the City Farm School. I thought that they could provide more information on the new Internship program, as well as bring different points of view on Concordia’ initiatives in the area of sustainability. The interviews took part mainly at the site of the City Farm School at Loyola Campus (the

herbal garden), in the Greenhouse and in a Commune (in Montreal) where one of the participants was living. The interviews took between 20 to 46 minutes each.

All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. Transcribing of the interviews took the Fall of 2013 and Winter of 2014. It appeared that the ten-day period in which I intended to do this was far too optimistic, as I found that the best way for me was to listen to the same interview in different periods of time again and again, so that I can gradually grasp and clear all the problematic sentences or words. Then I started sending the scripts to the participants, asking them to have a look and to help, when necessary, with a particular expression or word. This stage again took longer than expected due to circumstances connected to my work schedule and health problems.

In May 2014, in order to make a living, I had to handle two more jobs, and worked three jobs from September 2014 through to May 2015. Some health issues in 2013 which continued in 2014, also took a heavy toll on my time and stamina. The writing of my thesis at that particular time was really a challenge and I had to postpone it.

As a result, the titles of the projects and of people are described in my research the way I found them in 2012 – 2014, when I was gathering my information. The University and its organizations have continued to evolve and develop. Many things have changed since I started investigating information for my research. These later changes are not taken into account and not included in this thesis.

I shall now present the data in the form of profiles based on the interviews.

Profiles

This section will present the interview results from all of the participants in the study as a way to provide the raw data. The interviews are presented in terms of profiles

of those volunteers who accepted to be interviewed: The two co-coordinators of the Greenhouse and the Loyola Farm, CO1 and CO2, followed by Emma, Ray, Katherine, Zöe and Geena. It is to be noted that all were female participants except for CO2. The profiles are presented in the order in which the interviews took place.

Co-Coordinator 1 (CO1)-Female. CO1 is a former student of Concordia university who has graduated recently. Before joining the Greenhouse and the Loyola Farm, she was involved with Tapthirst – student organization. Tapthirst’s goal was to make the campus “bottled water free”. Later, in the Greenhouse, her role was to give support to people who were running the projects – for example, people involved in Internship for the Sustainability Minor, or for Geography, or for Engineering. She herself also had few small projects. The financial management of the Greenhouse and the Loyola Farm projects was part of her responsibility in addition to the coordination with the University and ensuring that the two organizations worked well together.

As co-coordinator of the Concordia City Farm School, she prepares the planning and organization of the work in the garden, together with Co-coordinator 2 (CO2) during the winter. This work involves setting up the curriculum, the different streams which would be offered, the schedules, calculation of costs, and the planning of materials needed. Then the process includes hiring people who should be working in the Greenhouse (with the seedlings, for example), and in the gardens. Next step of the job is to interview students who have applied to the Internship program. The aim here is to see if they could commit for the whole period of eight months, and if they were interested, in turn, in teaching the acquired knowledge once they completed the program. An essential

part of the Program is that every student would give one or two workshops, based on what they have learned.

The City Farm School started with a one week course at the Greenhouse where the volunteering was optional. Then the Co-coordinators decided that if participants are involved over a period of eight months (or the whole cycle), they will learn more. Next decision on the way to the development of the City Farm School was to give opportunity for participants to decide what exactly they were interested to do – for example, to work with children, vegetables or herbs and to choose their stream. “The educational aspect has always been important”, she says. As part of this process CO1 shares that she feels the difference between her work when she was still a student, and now. Before she was just writing papers about things that she cared about in the world, but “did not feel any kind of positive impact” that she was making; while working now for the City Farm School, she feels that she is able to use her skills, to give and “to help make the world that I want to live in...”

She developed an interest to herbs when she was a teenager. At that time she was interested in medicinal plants and took some workshops, visited some herbalists’ stores, talking to people and buying some salves. Earlier, when she was a child, she remembers that her grand-mother, who had grown up on farms, very often asked kids to pick a wild plant and told them where to put it and how to use it in case of injuries, as when an arm was bleeding, for example. So did her Mom. They also picked flowers and made soap with them. Her Mom was using some herbs for cuts and bruises, for cooking and in salads. They did not grow many herbs, mainly were buying them, but were picking lots of wild plants. After being involved with the Greenhouse and the Loyola Farm, CO1

realized that it is not so difficult to grow herbs and “to transform them for self-healing”. It is something that could be “learned”, and the most important aspect of it is the autonomy that it gives, “to have the knowledge to heal yourself and to heal your friends”.

At present, CO1 grows a lot of herbs for eating and for teas, not so much for medicinal purposes, but for making teas that are nice to consume. She hopes also that the new Program will help her learn how to transform herbs. The most important aspect of herbs for her is the self-healing one. She connects herbs to sustainability in terms of autonomy, again, that will help people not to be participants in the pharmaceutical industry all the time, but also to community, to sharing of that knowledge, opportunity to make your own life and the lives of people that you care about better. What she also mentions is the “mystery” – how one so small thing as an herb can do so many things for a person. She finds exciting learning how fast the plants develop and how from a small bag with seeds one soon gets plants, and then a whole garden and a huge harvest.

Co-Coordinator 2 (CO2)-Male. His path to sustainability and to position as a coordinator started when he, as a new student at Concordia, decided to volunteer for the Greenhouse, because he was interested in growing mushrooms. Soon the first Educational Coordinator’s position was opened and he took it, starting with hosting workshops for other people. As the main idea was to do more on-site education, the idea transited quickly into the City Farm School, where his scope of activities includes setting up the curriculum, choosing teachers, topics, time; involving in publicity; finding students for the School, etc. Another aspect of his duties is to manage the Loyola Farm in terms of tools and materials needed for the work; working in the garden, co-coordinating internship students who are working to build the gardens.

The City Farm School aims through collective, non-hierarchical management practices, to encourage the idea of urban agriculture and sustainability. Its objective is to provide a full cycle of education - from preparing the soil to harvesting, offering opportunity to make mistakes and to learn, to bringing people together, because this is one of the functions of education, too. This is why the co-coordinators have not looked at the City Farm School just as a space that could be tended by volunteers, but as a long, eight-month program, including a lot of work, so that the mistakes could be corrected through getting “first, second and third chances through the course of the year”. What they want to show is that “food can be produced where people actively live”, if they really commit. Commitment is also what differentiates often the volunteers in the herbs garden or Greenhouse from the Internship students (which are the City Farm students) – the latter have the opportunity to see the development of a plant in all its stages, in all months, whereas the volunteer, even if they transform the herb, they would see it and work with it only one other time.

Before enrolling as a student at Concordia he had no experience with herbs, except for having a close friend who had received an education at an “Herb school”. For example, he had never grown or transformed herbs; but he wanted to support the idea of people growing their own medicine and self-healing, because he believed in the healing properties of herbs, and because he had his doubts regarding “capitalization and marketing of the pharmaceuticals and whoever else has control over those things”. His family used herbs for cooking, and just recently started growing some mints and chives in pots.

He is fascinated with perennial plants and feels fortunate to be around a garden for a few years and to observe how plants come back every year. During the time he worked for Sustainable Concordia he acquired more confidence about herbs, more awareness and knowledge about their ways of transformation and their healing qualities. He founds both “interesting and empowering” the fact that herbs have specific functions, one can grow them for specific purposes and that they give back so much. Now he has a comfrey salve at home to use on skin and it works very quickly.

Tending the Loyola garden helped him to start identifying different herbs, their needs and understanding how they work. And although at the time of the interview he was not necessarily growing herbs or drinking herbal teas, CO2 said that the more one understands herbs, soils and pollinators, one becomes “more aware, more conscious, I guess, of nature, or the environment” – which, he admits, might be “the biggest thing” in terms of a personal change – to realize that things that have always been around us have the power to do so many good things for us. One of the most exciting things he learned is the skill to calculate and plan – how many and which herbs one can grow on a small plot, or the productivity capacity of a garden. He would like to share the knowledge he already has on herbs – their growth pattern, optimum climate requirements, specifics of the soils and usage of each plant. He shared that if he could have a small farm, he would for sure manage a herb garden there.

He is really excited knowing that more and more people have started believing in the healing possibilities of herbs and the discovery that growing herbs is relatively inexpensive, compared to buying natural products. With regard to life style, he thought that herbs offer a chance of a healthier life-style.

He saw the role of herbs for sustainability in society as taking the control away from the large corporations and pharma companies. But he also observed that at the same time when we learn “to consume the world,” “people start to have co-ops, and take care of people in their own ways of homeopathic ways and holistic medicine”. The aim would be not to replace entirely the Western medicine, but to have control over plants and access to them, as many medications in the pharmacies are derived from herbs. It will also help people to realize that most of the knowledge that nowadays companies and scientists have is taken from the knowledge passed through tradition. He also shared the conviction that many people now want to take back the knowledge about self-medicating and autonomy to their communities.

Emma. She is a student in Concordia and participant in the Internship program of the Loyola Farm School about medicinal usage of herbs. She decided to choose this program because she was interested in different kinds of healing work and in herbal medicine in particular. She shared with me that before joining the program she had just a general knowledge on herbs, and she had no confidence in this knowledge. But being always drawn to traditional alternative kind of medicine, she decided that food and things we consume have important influence on our bodies, and therefore are good starting points in her journey to healing. Another reason to focus on herbs was that they are accessible, not very expensive, often grown locally and not very complicated to plant and grow. The third reason is the opportunity to learn about different strategies of healing which can be used for self-healing and for helping friends, especially when this process does not require special equipment or expensive medications. She is interested in doing “other kinds of healing work” in the future, not related to herbs, but wants to have “a

solid grasp on a lot of things to do with a herbal medicine”, so whatever she does, this asset is with her. That is why she sees the Internship Program at Concordia as a beginning of a long process.

Emma does not feel herself as part of an herbal tradition. She says that it was not something that she or her Mom grew with. But despite the little knowledge she had before about herbs, Emma was actually drinking herbal teas. Her experience at that time could be described as intuitive. For example, she had a desire to drink fennel or sage tea, and did so for some time. Later, when she started looking up information about these herbs, she realized that their qualities were exactly what her body needed at that time. Basically she was choosing herbs that she was drawn to and that taste good, as she liked the idea about “different personalities of plants and their energetic qualities”.

In her family herbs were almost not used at all. She mentions that her mother had herbs in their garden, but used them for cooking, like chives, and definitely not for medicinal purposes. On the contrary, she knows many people who are interested in herbs and their medicinal usage, people who have found an herb to heal a health problem, and she thinks that their number was now increasing. At the time of the interview, her present usage of herbs was still minimal, for example, with different tea blends. She has no experience with transformation of herbs – in oil, alcohol, or in soups, for example, but is looking forward to learning more.

Emma explained that there was a difference in her perception of herbs before and after she started the Program. Her practical, hands-on work started when a year ago, she was co-managing the People’s Potato garden, where there were some herbs, too. She also had a balcony garden, although she admitted that there were not many herbs growing

there. During her work with gardens and herbs she started “very slowly learning to speak the language of plants and of herbs” – for example, she started noticing and recognizing them in the wild. She realizes that they have always been there, but she did not see them. Also she feels herself more connected to them, to their specific “personalities and energies”, and having acquired more respect for them. Starting with knowledge about soils and planting, and continuing with development of a garden helped her to realize what is behind the bags of tea that we just buy, and changes her attitude - she starts appreciating where the herbs come from. Another element of her newly acquired knowledge about herbs is their complexity – for example, how different elements and parts of one herb can treat different health conditions.

She understands the role and importance of herbs in her life as having more autonomy over her body and health in general. It means to be able to make choices about healing that is more affordable, accessible and to have the control over dosage, for example; or just to be aware of what is the effect of it to the body, where it comes from, and to be able to make it yourself. This is the “political” aspect, a reminder that we can have the control over our bodies and our healing and we could not and we do not depend completely on doctors and hospitals. The second aspect that she finds really amazing about herbs is that they grow naturally in every region, and usually in every region people can find herbs for the health issues affecting them. It questions the importance of so many so called “superfoods.” In terms of sustainability she finds it very powerful – the fact that we can cultivate many medicinal plants in our region and it is not necessary to look for them in other countries.

Ray. Ray is a student at Concordia and volunteered at the Greenhouse for about six months at the rate of one volunteer session per week. Every Saturday, she went there to water the plants and to take care of them and do some weeding.

She has chosen volunteering because “It doesn’t put a price on your time”, and because through volunteering one can “add to something greater than yourself”. She happens also to take care at the Tea Atrium although unplanned, as there was a need for help in this area of the Greenhouse when she started volunteering. But she goes to the Greenhouse, because for her it is a “Zen” place – when you take care about something else without expecting gratitude.

Soon after her arrival at Canada she heard about the Greenhouse, and later she found her way to the volunteering sessions on Fridays, then started going there after volunteering at People’s Potato. As a volunteer at People’s Potato she enjoys doing the preparation work, because it offers opportunity to have some “quiet busy time”, and not talking if she wants to be just with herself and to concentrate. Also, she likes the community, and hopes that this experience will help her learn to cook. In regard to her work at People’s Potato, Ray has started learning more about herbs used in cooking. For example, she experiments how to preserve coriander, dill and parsley in oil, mashed up with garlic.

Prior to working in the Greenhouse, Ray had just a general knowledge about herbs (“Mint is good for your breath”, “Chamomile to sleep better”), and she did not use herbs personally. Her Mother uses herbs to some extent, knowing what herbs are needed for different conditions, but she buys them. Ray shares that before joining the Greenhouse she did not perceive some of the herbs (arnica, calendula) as plants, as she

was not able to imagine them. She also learns about usage of different parts of the herbs – for example, how to make a tea from the raspberry leaves, while before she would not think of leaves, but only of fruits. With months of a closer contact with the plants at the Greenhouse, now she can recognize some of them (comfrey, borage, mint, nettle, etc.), and becomes more aware of the usage of different herbs in cosmetics and tooth-paste, for example. Seeing the real, green and “alive” plant makes the difference, as before, even when she was buying herbs for cooking, they were mostly dry and cut, and one could not “see” the whole plant. She wraps it all up by stating that herbs in the Greenhouse are the “ultimate source of education”.

Another source of information about herbs in her life is a friend of hers, who studies quite actively herbs and has given some to her – Chamomile, Trefoil, Maca. For next year, Ray has a plan to make an herb garden somewhere outside of Concordia, close to a parking lot. She sees it made out of old tires found in the streets, as lifted beds, that could be planted with vegetables and herbs. She hopes that it could create community and become a place where children who walk by would see something interesting. But all this could become a reality if the right people come together, as her priority now is resources for community building. For the time being, to learn about herbs is not a priority. Ray would like to be able to grow easily some herbs, and to know how to produce something out of them, like salves or gels, if the opportunity comes along, as for now herbs are not part of her regular life.

Ray feels that “with the change of the social structure”, “traditions have been lost”, and “they [people] do not have kitchen gardens anymore...” Ray’s opinion is that the loss of our oral medicinal traditions and knowledge about the effect that different

foods have on our bodies makes us “susceptible to the influence of the people who want something from us”. Sustainable living, according to her, requires that herbs be grown in the kitchen. It will be “nature’s pharmacy”, and people will be using the real plants to prepare their teas, soups, meals, and not the artificial aromas. Part of her image of sustainable living is to create a space with sustainable agriculture and an environment where all that children put in their mouth, in terms of food, is safe. Herbs are a way of knowing that we used to have many years before the big scientific books were invented.

Katherine. Katherine is a graduate student at Concordia. She decides to volunteer in the Greenhouse in order to get to know more about plants, to be able to make a garden in the future, and also because it allows her to take a break from her research. She has volunteered before in the community – helping kids to do their homework, teaching kids and adults, etc. In the Greenhouse she cuts plants, if they are too long, harvests them, clean them from bugs, changes the soil, if necessary, participates in the cultivation of seeds.

Before volunteering for the Greenhouse, she did not know about herbs. Katherine herself did not use herbs before. As her family lived in the city, she does not think that her grandparents used herbs. She does not know though how her mother learned about herbs. Her Mom used to make herbal teas, explaining what is for what, but she was not growing herbs, just was buying them. So she does not know how and when her Mom has learned about herbs. Her mother in law, though, has a big garden with many herbs there, and makes many herbal teas in cases of fever, cold, or stress, for example. She also cooks with herbs. Now, Katherine makes teas and uses some herbs for cooking. The difference in her perception of herbs before and now, according to her, is that now she is more

interested to look up information about a herb that she finds; she recognizes herbs by their smell and knows that some of them grow faster than others. The most important things she learned in the Greenhouse is to know when to harvest them; when to cut; what kind of bugs live in them; which ones are dangerous for the plant. She has learned a lot recently by sharing experience with people who know about herbs. Once she had to prepare stickers with explanations about the functions of the different herbs in order to mark the pots with dry teas, so she discovered some of their advantages and benefits. Now she says that herbs are good for your health, when you drink teas and cook with them. What she likes about them is their shape and smell. In the future she likes to learn about more types of herbs. Katherine thinks that people today are becoming more interested in plants and in herbs in particular. For example, Concordia has different projects and grows herbs at different places; so does the Plateau area in Montreal; there are restaurants and supermarkets that grow herbs in the vicinity.

Zöe. Zöe has recently finished her studies at Concordia. As she was born in a country in Africa, she is interested in oral history and knowledge that is lost or threatened. This, together with her interest in permaculture, forms the basis for her decision to go to Africa the previous summer as a volunteer, and to do some work with medicinal plants there. In Tanzania she sets up a medicinal permaculture garden by looking for indigenous species that she then moves into the garden. Before going to Africa, she became interested in natural health due to some personal health issues. As the pharmaceutical medications do not help, but even worsen the situation, she decided to do some research and to try to take care of herself. So as she describes it, her interest in medicinal plants was a result of self care, but also has a political level. In terms of natural

means for healing, Zöe's attention is drawn to the pharmaceutical companies who make pills out of medicinal plants and then sell them processed and patented back to the local people. On a more biological level, she learns how quickly the bacteria could grow and adapt in our body, so that intake of antibiotics stops being effective. She realized that she has some knowledge about medicinal plants in the tropics, but not about these plants here in Quebec, so when she heard about the Internship Program of Concordia, she enrolled. Also, she sees the Program as an opportunity to "take action", to change the situation in her life, and then to spread this knowledge.

Before joining the Program Zöe mostly used herbs for cooking and for a while was interested in supplements. But she did not yet have her own idea about the way to approach the medicinal plants and although had some information about herbs, did not know how to cultivate and transform them. As her Mom was a doctor, in her early childhood Zöe "grew up in an environment where there was a lot of trust in pharmaceuticals". There were not many herbs at their home, as her mother was quite busy and had no time to learn more about alternative forms of healing. Usually when there was a need, she was prescribing ready-made medications. But she became really interested in herbs when the medications actually stopped being effective on her body.

After joining the Program, Zöe is making and using herbal teas and is collecting herbs to learn and transform in tinctures. She is amazed by the number of herbs that we take just for spices, but which have medicinal usage, too, as basil, or dandelions. She also shares that now, when she walks around the City, she can see different medicinal plants in her environment and feels connected in a new way to them. One of the most exciting findings for Zöe was an understanding of our interconnectedness with plants – how our

bodies react to them, and how they grow where people need them. All this determines her drive to understand holistic healing. This resulted also in her attempt to stop using prescribed medications, and to question them before taking, if necessary. Another important element of learning that she feels is her higher sensibility to presence and role of herbs that we see sometimes just as weeds, and try to get rid of. Instead of ripping them out, she tries to understand why they are there, and to learn how to decrease their numbers by changing the soil.

In the future, she wants to learn more about herbs, although not necessarily in institutionalized contexts but in more informal environments. A dream to go again to Africa is part of this, too. But the most important objective is that Zöe wants to make herbal knowledge an integral part of her life-style. More concretely, after learning about plant identification, gardening and then – transformation in the Program, she needs to know more about interaction between herbs and their different uses. The questions of transmission of this old knowledge and folk knowledge (in terms of herbs) to the present context are the most important aims for her.

Zöe looks at the term “tradition knowledge” we use for knowledge about herbs, as a bit misleading, as actually tradition and culture are fluid and changing. She thinks that many years ago, in the middle ages, we started to suppress our traditional knowledge; then the colonialism in our newer history continues to “eradicate indigenous knowledges”, so this type of knowledge now has “hybridized” with knowledge from elsewhere, and is no longer in its original form.

Zoe's opinion is that our approach to healing and our present day lifestyles are not sustainable. But it becomes clearer for many people that "human health is tied to environmental health" and what is dangerous for one is dangerous for others as well.

Geena. Geena has recently finished her studies at Concordia. She shares that she has always been attracted to plants in an almost "mystical way". She heard about herbs first from her Mom. Later, as a teenager, she worked one summer on a farm, where she was harvesting nettle and lemon balm. But she thinks that she has not used these opportunities to make her experience a learning one to the degree that she would like, and so she enrolled in the Internship Program at Concordia. Her reasons for doing so are several, among these: a) she is interested in herbs; b) there is no capitalist element in it (it is about knowledge and experience with herbs, not about selling and controlling a market); c) the cost is lower compared to other places, and d) it is a hands-on program.

Her mother grew up in the countryside of France. Later she worked in agriculture. Her strong connection with the earth and plants, as well as her knowledge of herbs-- probably inherited from the grand-parent--have possibly formed the basis for Geena's interest later. When she goes to visit her family in France, she can speak about herbs and herbal treatment with her relatives, her aunt and her cousin. As she describes it, "there is still kind of impulse to treat yourself through herbs, that doesn't exist really in North America..." People use herbs, help themselves against colds when the winter is rough, and the herbal shops are "functioning well". Even nowadays, people transmit orally the knowledge about different uses of herbs. To give the example of her cousin who shows her a herb and explains that it has been traditionally used by women for abortions, therefore people used to grow it in front of their houses.

She planted a little herbal garden by her house. She admits that the herbal teas are not her preferred drink; she likes some of them, when needed, but in general she prefers tinctures. She has been making some, as California poppy tincture, yarrow, tincture, sage, hyssop and thyme etc. Also she sometimes dries herbs, but, she says she does not feel so connected to the dried herbs. As for the usage, except the skullcap tincture that she takes when stressed, she is not taking any herbs on a regular basis. Recently she has been thinking about and debating the possible “toxicity of the soil versus medicinal benefits of the plant”, and car exhaust compared to pesticides.

During her hands-on experience in the Internship program Geena has encountered an interesting difference in her attitude towards herbs. She feels (without any references to spirituality at all) as if she is more grateful (to the plants) when she harvests them for herself. As she tries to explain it, “having to do things on a larger scale takes away this ability to be in the moment, a little more grateful”. That is why she feels she needs to know why in the process of work during the Internship they harvest this or that herb, for what purpose.

She tells that she has learned the scent of the fresh herbs (compared to dry ones), and has seen how some of the herbs look like when they are live in nature. Another new element is the importance of knowing what you are going to grow in your garden, and why - the purpose and planning. She also mentions the pleasure to be together with other people who like herbs, opportunity to talk about this, and to do things “collectively”. Personally, herbs are important to her; she likes them and feels happy when around them. She thinks that herbs are “very magical”, “beautiful”, “smell nice and are interesting”, and tend to be very “independent”. She wants to learn more about them, and to find a

way to make the knowledge about herbs more accessible to people. What she finds inspiring about herbs is that one can grow them, can learn about them, and share them with other people. According to Geena, it is exciting that nowadays people are again rediscovering herbs, because “people have lost sight of them” at one period of time. Her future interaction with herbs she sees in an herbal school, or, having an apprenticeship with someone who knows them well, through an organization for organic farming, for example. She is interested in learning about more herbs; and also more about some herbs’ specifics – for example, also about contra-indications and combinations of different plants.

Geena thinks that herbal knowledge is still being passed down in traditional ways, like her family does it. Often, “there is really interesting and funny superstition involved”. But the way we think about herbs is influenced by the system we live in with its commodification and specialization, with its identifying who can prescribe medications and who can have access to it, which, she thinks, further “closes the knowledge”. But herbs can be “incredibly empowering for people” – especially for women, because the herbal tradition comes from women in her family. Nowadays herbs could be an alternative to pharmaceuticals, she admits, but asks what we could do if all these herbs and plants are toxic due to environmental pollution.

Geena likes the “mystical and magical understanding of herbs that people have”, as well as the superstitious qualities of herbs (although she acknowledges them), which are part of the traditional knowledge. These qualities of herbs and herbal tradition are lost in federal and government regulations and in industrial production.

Having presented the data collected in interviews with the volunteer participants we are now going to examine and analyze the data in terms of emerging themes for discussion.

Chapter Four: Analysis and Findings

Chapter 3 presented the methodology used to collect the data for this thesis and the raw data compiled in the form of profiles based on the interviews with the participants in the study in the order in which their interviews took place. Based on the profiles, this chapter analyzes the raw data in terms of emerging themes which are described and grouped into seven umbrella themes. This section is followed by a brief discussion and the recommendations.

Themes

Most qualitative researchers...They feel that the researcher should examine assumptions about what belongs in categories rather than having these assumptions determine the research design.

(Bogdan, p. 61, 2003)

During the analyses of the interviews and the rest of the data described in the preceding chapters, thirty one themes were extracted and these were grouped under eight categories. I used words and expressions directly from interviews for the headings of these categories. During the process of identification of categories, I many times referred to the above citation by Bogdan.

Experience of being around one's own garden. I chose to start with this topic because the herb garden is the main site of the work with herbs, and also because it could be found in the stories of all interviewees and many of the documents in the chapter "Context" – from Loyola herb garden, the Greenhouse, through People's Potato garden and the Health services Newsletter, which also encourages students to develop their own herb garden at home. Some of participants in the interviews speak about having their own

garden; some – about the gardens of their mothers or mothers in law; some have an experience working in a herb garden, while others wish to make their own herb garden in the future. Concordia Food systems' Project created the herb garden in Loyola, as mentioned before, to grow there teas and some medicinal herbs. The People's Potato garden with vegetables had a little herb patch, to which Emma tended when she worked there. All of them have their personal experience with a herb garden, but all focus on different aspects of their relationship with it. For example, (Ray) identifies garden with the tradition – “I feel the traditions have been lost... With the change of the social structure... they don't have the kitchen gardens anymore...”.

One of the Co-coordinators (2) focuses on biodiversity:

Well, now that I've been around that herbs garden that is set in Loyola I one hundred percent will, definitely, if I ever have even a remotely small pieces of land, will have a herb garden, for sure, that that's no question about that... I'll also try to have as big of a diversity of herbs in the garden as possible, it's really smart to do so for the biodiversity that it brings to a garden, in particular pollinators, and different beneficial insects...

Co-coordinator (1) acknowledges the positive reinforcement gained from the garden:

...you sort of, like, work and start with a little bag of seeds and you start a bunch of plants, and you start a big garden, and you end with a huge harvest, and all this happens, like, really fast (smiles)... It's constant... It's constant positive reinforcement (laughs).

Zöe' first experience is to learn and help building a medicinal permaculture garden in Tanzania, while Co-coordinator (1) and Geena grow their own herbs. But as Geena points out, having a garden requires mutuality and creates relationship:

Having a herb garden, you're attending to this garden, and you are giving it more care than it would otherwise, but it's also giving the care back and that's... like, important to acknowledge that relationship

Slowly learning to speak the language of herbs. Although the participants in the interviews not always formulate it like this literally, this theme is about the change in their perception of herbs. It shows the steps in the process; small changes that lead to bigger ones.

It starts by recognizing the plant – its shape, smell, color and features, and helps differentiating herbs. Participants do it in a different way - depending on the previous experience, knowledge and motivation. And although they all mention that they had stated recognizing more herbs, the volunteers in the Greenhouse focus mainly on physical appearance and external features of the plants, while the interns and co-coordinators speak also about different qualities the plant possess, both physical and more intangible. As one of volunteers, Ray, summarized it so well, the biggest difference is that herbs become real – “...I start recognizing more herb names in conversations, and in the Greenhouse, it’s like, “Oh, look! The nettles are getting kind of big, we should cut it back!”

It refers also to the difference between dry and fresh herbs:

I remember looking at oregano, thyme or savory for the first time, you know, when you buy them, in a spice form, so already dry and crumbed, not very recognizable as plant, it’s just...crumby stuff.

Katherine speaks about her experience of senses and the smell of herbs:

Well, now I know sage, like I didn’t know what it was, and I drink sage...(another sentence, then) Hmmm, and I can recognize sage from the smell...

The other participants who have spent more time working with herbs and other plants, add extra features. They confirm that the process which begins with a seed and the makes them feel “...more comfortable and confident, instead of just kind of feeling like: I don’t know anything about plants, I don’t know what to do!” (Emma)

Getting deeper, Emma says that herbs seem to be much more “complicated” compared to her previous understanding of them. She realizes that it is much more than memorizing the functions of herbs, and that “...they interact very differently with different people, types of personalities, and what else you eat, and what other herbs you’re taking, and that’s been the main thing”.

Becoming aware of the multiple functions of the herbs is expressed by Zöe:

Well, there are a lot of herbs that we just think as a spice and we don’t realize how important they are and how powerful they can be, like basil for example. It’s something that I always cooked with, and eaten but never looked into the other properties that it has, so that now that I’m learning all these new things about plants I’ve always known it’s really exciting and you kind of...you appreciate them in a new way, like dandelions for example.

Another dimension, found in all interns’ interviews, highlights the ability of herbs to grow anywhere and to sustain:

I think like herbs are very magical, I think that they are beautiful, and smell nice and are interesting usually, and tend to grow in places that other thing is not grown, and tend to be very independent in ways that other beings, aren’t...
(Geena)

This leads to their observation that:

...I think for the most part everything we need is probably near us and that we don’t have to go very far, so I think that is a really powerful thing, to recognize that we can well craft and cultivate a lot of the kind of medicinal plants we want within our region and don’t actually have to go to other countries and farm there and shift things and package them that we can probably do lot of them at home, and a lot more...with a lot less..lot less fuss, I guess, and a lot less damage (smiles)...” (Emma).

All these new discoveries acknowledged by most of participants, result in new attitude - to “appreciate their existence”, “learn how to value these plants instead of get rid of them” (Zöe).

In the process of hands-on experience with growing herbs, becoming more familiar with the plants and discovering their different facets, participants also speak

about the less tangible aspects of their relationship with the plants. Geena shares that when she was a child, she was “very attracted to plants in almost a mystical way. I would get...like feelings from plants...”. Emma also says that now she is “...feeling more connected to, yeah, to, like, personalities and energies and plants...”.

Being asked to describe the biggest change observed in their thinking and practice regarding herbs, all participants understandably mention different aspects. However, what is valid for everyone is that they express it in the realm of emotions – using the words associated with emotions, like “exciting”, or “amazing”, and that the change lies within the relationship of the humans with the nature. For example, for one of the coordinators (2) it is the growing awareness:

...I’ve become able to identify more plants and understand how plants work and their needs and stuff, and I find it really exciting, because the more you’re looking to that the more you understand soil, and you understand pollinators, and you understand things along those lines so you become more aware, more conscious, I guess, of nature, or the environment, so, I mean, that’s a big change it’s hard to explain, but that’s probably the biggest thing

For Emma, it is the parallel between needs of people and herbs:

...it’s totally amazing that herbs...the way that they grow in relationship with each other and the way they grow in the different regions and that every region where people live generally has plants that grow there naturally that are beneficial for all kinds of things like all kind of elements and people might be affected by in this area...

Zöe describes it from the point of view of our body as a system:

...the most exciting about this is realizing how closely linked we are with the plant growth...I feel like that’s a connection just so ancient and deep that we kind of lost it over time...

And also:

...like we are so deeply intertwined with plants’ life, and learning about herbs is a mean to realize that, and just how, like, our body systems are interacting intimately with various herbs...I think is really exciting (Zöe).

Generations of knowledge that have been passed down. In this category I present the tradition in herbal knowledge, as learned by the participants from their mothers: (“My Mom used to make tea out of herbs”- Katherine), families and observed as an element of the human development. Here also is included a sub-category about a source that is outside of the families, but still within close networks, and who also has its presence and influence on the interviewees – the friend.

Three of the participants also mention that their mothers are from a generation who were taught to be treated with pharmaceuticals, and although two of them were not familiar with herbs and healing, the third one was carrying both the skepticism of its generation and also the knowledge about herbs and their usages. One says that their parents started recently growing some herbs for cooking, like mint and chives.

Most of them also focus on the fact that very often their families (or they themselves) when using herbs used to buy dry herbs from the shop. What I saw as a repetitive element in most of the interviews (five out of seven) is the identification by the participants of the source of their first experience or knowledge of herbs with their mothers. Usually it is associated with herbs for cooking, the herbal teas or gels, used when they were young; with what they have heard from their Moms or grand-mothers (“Just things your mother tells you. Mint is good for your breath, chamomile to sleep better” – Ray). Another related fact is growing up in the countryside, either for the participant, or for their mother or grand-parents. Nobody from them relates the first impressions and experience with herbs to the father. Also, the friends, where they appeared in the interviews, where also referred as “she”.

Both Ray and Geena speak about tradition with regard to the power of women in the past.

Ray:

...And she's pretty much a witch, people call her, and like, "I don't know the answer to that", and then, fifteen minutes later – "Do this, that, apply this, should be fine in three days", and she's like "I don't know I know that!"

The co-coordinator (1):

My Mom grew up in a small town in the country and her parents grew up on farms, and so, when I was a kid we'd go to my grand-mother's and we like, she'd be like: "Pick these things!", we pick them and give them to her and she would do something with it...like if we got injured she say like, "Pick certain plants and put them on your arms while bleeding"...and...that kind of thing I still don't know what she was doing (laughs), but yeah, she used them, she definitely used them, we made soap once, picked flowers to make soap, we picked berries and that kind of things, so...

Geena also tells about a conversation with her cousin, who is also interested in herbs. One day she shows her a herb growing nearby and explains that in the past, women were growing this herb next to their houses because it was traditionally used for abortions: "...in my tradition herbal knowledge came from the woman and the family, and I think that was the way for like women to empower themselves and to have specific knowledges ...".

In three out of seven cases, participants shared that if their mothers were asked if they knew something about herbs, they would give a negative answer; but in reality they "did it", and were good at identifying herbs and using some of their qualities. It seemed like their Moms had inherited tradition and used it unconsciously.

Again, three of the interviewees shared that they have a friend or roommate who are interested in herbs, or have studied herbal medicine and know quite a lot. Their conversations help participants to learn new things, but, as Ray says, "I'm not studying it. That's just absorbing. It makes me more receptive".

Ray also brings in the theme about kids as the next generation– and asks what they would learn from our life-style now; she thinks that “Kids that grow zucchinis eat zucchinis, kids that grow herbs eat herbs...”.

Most interviewees speak about herbal tradition in its different aspects, defined by their personal perception and interests. It is explained as something (knowledge, skills, sense) transmitted from generation to generation. For Geena, “mystical and magical understandings of herbs” in past tradition are lost in the different kind of regulations – federal, government and in the “big production”.

She thinks: “... it’s really interesting to compare the traditional magical uses of herbs with the traditional medicinal and how sometimes they don’t match up at all...” She also shares that she likes “...superstitious things although acknowledging they’re superstitious...”...kind of comforting little rituals to do, involving herbs...”.

Zöe is interested in folk knowledge as part of tradition. When she examines tradition she finds out that “tradition can be misleading because it sounds like such a fixed category...”, but in our “globalized system”, it “comes to us in kind of morphed way, and blends with knowledge from elsewhere, so it’s hybridized in a way, I think it’s also interesting...”.

Interested in alternative and traditional healing. Again, I was questioning my assumptions about what should go into this category. At first, I divided healing from cooking with herbs. But then, thinking over the words of one of interviewees, I decided to accept her point about food as medication. Herbs also can be viewed as food. Although then we do not focus on their medicinal properties, and we do not take them in a concentrated form, their medicinal influence still exists.

The reasons for participants to be involved in this Program were different. Some of them mentioned their interest in natural health, self-medication and permaculture (Zöe), medicinal herbs (Geena, CO1), and herbs as a step of more general body healing (Emma). Three of them share that their own search to fix some health issues on the basis of their interest. Six out of seven interviewees speak about having this knowledge on herbs and how they function in order to help a friend or a relative, who has an issue and who is asking for an advice.

Five of them reported drinking herbal teas (“I learnt it here, but my mother in law and my Mom they use them (herbs) for everything: like, you drink a tea because you are stressed out, or you have a cold, or...yeah”. Katherine). Some use just good tasting herbal teas, others look for medicinal properties; some do it on a regular basis, while others – when there is a need. Emma says:

I would drink (before) a lot of herbal tea, I drink a lot of like nettle tea and, raspberry leaf and different things that are good for hormonal systems, and I’d drink herbs that I thought that I was drawn to and that taste good...

The practical part of the Program included transformation of the herbs and preparation of tea-blends, tinctures and balms. A few of the participants in Internship program already had some idea and practice with transformation of plants, but in general, almost all of them were impatient to have this experience soon.

All of the participants reported that they, or their families, use herbs with cooking.

Zöe summarizes the link between herbs and nutrition as:

...And learning more about herbs has also made me wanna learn more about the body, from a...that it isn’t, like, just a question of scientific knowledge that I’ve been taught, like learning more about nutrition, and that sort of things, so I’ve really been trying to use food as my medicine...yeah.

Katherine also confirms that: “Your health improves when you drink teas out of herbs or when you cook with herbs”, and Emma summarizes that “...it makes sense that food and things that we consume have a huge impact on our health...”.

There is quite a lot of data found in Concordia’s initiatives on herbs used for cooking. In the chapter “Context” I mention the Newsletter of the Health Services, which describes the history, different types of herbs and their usage with cooking, leading to a healthier diet. In the cookbook of People’s Potato herbs also have their place, in dry or fresh form, to “do wanders for food”.

The capitalist, intensive way of healing (the political). Looking deeper into prerequisites for becoming interested in herbal healing, in six out of seven interviews participants referred to the “political” – the way in which the present system of health services functions. It is connected with one of the topics which was part of the Internship program (“Self-healing is political”), which looks through the history of herbal medicine and its complex relations and issues with the nowadays scientific views and politics. Interviewees, contrast pharmaceutical companies and “the capitalist, intensive way of healing” (Zöe) to the holistic approach which values every individual. “Pharmaceutical industrial complex”, according to Ray, “can’t be good because they really clearly have an agenda, which is to make money, and to, unfortunately, keep people sick”. Zöe adds that our health system is unsustainable in terms of “construction,” “creation” and production of pharmaceuticals, “...putting a lot of pollution into the environment...”. Emma thinks that:

...we can have a lot of power and control and agency in healing ourselves and our communities and that all the, kind of like, info people are fed about being completely dependent on doctors and hospitals and prescription of medication is the only route to healing.

The co-coordinators pointed out that people would feel “empowered” (CO2) that they sometimes can grow herbs instead of buying them; and that “just having the power making decisions themselves is enormous in terms of sustainable society” (CO1). CO2 thinks that “Taking the control away from large corporations and pharmaceutical companies, that’s the biggest one” (herbs and their role in sustainability). They view one of the purposes of the Program as to make this knowledge about herbs more accessible to more people. Herbal medicine also is viewed as more accessible – as “dry herbs are often grown locally and often not very expensive and are not too hard to grow...”(Emma).

CO1 speaks about autonomy to:

access this knowledge and know that you can share it, and then make your life and the life of the people you care about, make their lives better, especially things like injuries you can go to, make preventative herbs, or even using herbs as a sort of reactionary medicine...”

while Emma looks on it as:

...autonomy over my own body and my own health, like learning more about the ways that I can...make choices...about my health that are affordable, accessible to me and that I have some level of control over like understanding the dose, understanding exactly what it does to my body, knowing where it comes from... choices that are affordable, accessible, control over understanding the doze... Zöe explains how people in Tanzania prefer to treat themselves with western

medications, even though these medications are based and made out of plants that grow there, and are patented by the pharmaceutical companies, and that there is “stigma against using natural remedies instead of going to the doctors, because of colonialism history...”. They do it because it looks “progressive and modern” (Zöe).

Geena gives an antithetical example about France, where “there’s still kind of impulse to treat yourself through herbs, that doesn’t exist really in North America I find...”.

Ray looks for the reasons and thinks that: "... by losing our oral traditions about medicine and about what different foods do to your body, we become susceptible to the influence of the people who want something from us".

Education brings people together. All participants in the interviews mention the value of sharing the knowledge. One of the components of the Internship Program, along with the hands-on experience in the garden, workshops and discussions based on readings, was the opportunity for students to develop and lead themselves a workshop during the course of studies. These workshops are open to the public.

In terms of "sharing", participants distinguish few meanings. First, it is the empowerment of others, ability to help the other people to get the knowledge about herbs. The second one is sharing as opportunity to learn from other people – for example, in the Greenhouse, at "People's Potato kitchen, during the Internship Program. And the third one is the pleasure to be able to speak with people who share similar interests and ideas.

The Co-coordinators, as well as Ray and Emma, focus on the impact and meaning of sharing the knowledge inside communities. As Co-coordinator (1) says, some of the participants in the Internship after finishing the Program are interested in working with different communities, like queer- and trans-communities, while other would like to teach young parents and children and thus to spread the knowledge.

The Co-coordinators brought a different aspect in "sharing" – giving back to the community and university for the chance and privilege to be near the garden, to work and to learn.

Another element that is acknowledged by all interviewees when they speak about the Internship Program is the importance of hands-on experience that leads to learning.

Starting from the seeds and seedlings in the Greenhouse, through preparation of the soil and planning of the garden, to planting, re-planting, taking care and harvesting herbs, to drying or transforming them into different products important for the well-being is an opportunity to observe and participate in the whole process of plants' growing that allows participants to understand and learn on the spot. As the CO2 also explains it, people can make mistakes, then to see the result and to correct them, because they would have few chances to do this during the year.

The Greenhouse, as seen from the chapter on "Context", and as acknowledged again in the interviews of four of participants, has grown through the years as an "ultimate source of education" (Ray), gradually developing through the various students' initiatives. It offers access to any of them to come, see and participate in some basic activities, connected with plants, nature and sustainability. The two volunteers also describe it as "A Zen place" (Ray), where you can do something for plants, and relax from your research (Katherine), for example, and definitely as a place when you can learn a lot about plants and herbs.

The City Farm School, an initiative of the Greenhouse which offered the Internship program, holds in its name its purpose. Co-coordinator (2) describes it like this:

Well, I think it actually brings the skills and problem-solving abilities into it, because, the education also really brings people together, that's another thing. The City Farm School is trying to create an atmosphere of collective, non-hierarchical management kind of system amongst the students to work together to create this, to further improve upon and encourage the idea of urban agriculture, urban sustainability...

and makes the point that it is not only a question of having a community garden but of getting free farmers at the end.

Asked about the way the future of the herbal Program in the City Farm School is seen, CO1 focuses again on attracting more outside groups, doing more teaching, creating a collective around herbs and keeping it as an educational space.

With regard to experiential education, here I have to mention also two other places reported by five of the interviewees. One is a herb school in Vermont, which seems to be famous for having a good educational program, and the WWOOF, which provide opportunities to go and have experience by working on an organic farm.

It's coming back. All of the participants in the interviews shared their observation that there is increased interest about plants and herbs in particular, as well as self-healing. They say that they know many more people now around them (friends), who are interested; and mention about some of their relatives who were skeptical before, but recently have asked them for advice or started using some herbal teas.

Discussing motivation of the students to join the Internship Program, Co-coordinator (1) mentions the desire of most of them to learn about the self-healing, and acknowledges the constant interest of people calling and writing in order to come and learn about things like herbs, gardening or composting. With regard to the interest among students and community, starting the Program could be seen also as a response to the demand.

One of the volunteers shared observations on the quite different type of settings where herbs could be found now in the city (Katherine). For example, she says, now some of the supermarkets grow their herbs. There are more herbs around Concordia University, on the Plateau of Montreal, and even these can now be found at some restaurants.

Information that I found about natural products (Chapter on Context) also provides data on the increase of usage of natural products and herbs in the world and in Canada.

Add to something greater than yourself. This title came from the interview of Ray, when she was speaking about volunteering. It reprises what the Jesuits called “To be man for others” (Bokser, 2007), when describing what volunteering meant for them. As it could be seen in the Context Chapter, volunteering is fundamental to many of the initiatives born there. Volunteers help the Greenhouse, work in the Loyola Farm, People’s Potato garden and Le Frigo Vert. All of the participants in the interviews also acknowledged having some volunteering experience. Ray says that she volunteer because “it doesn’t put a price on your time”, and because “You’re adding to something greater than yourself”. She particularly likes the atmosphere and quiet in the Greenhouse. For Katherine, it is a place to relax and to learn about plants. The Co-coordinator (1) says that the reasons of students to volunteer for the Greenhouse and the Loyola Farm before the Internship Program vary – from desire to be outside and to meet more people, as more-common, to learn how to garden. Sometimes they have been motivated by gaining a credit for their Internship, but it was in fewer cases, and students were coming from specific programs. The difference with the recent volunteers, compare to these few years ago, is that students and people, coming now, know more on the subject they are interested in, then before.

The participants enrolled in the Internship Program for different reasons. Most of them joined because they wanted to learn about self-healing. There were some interested

in this because of their own health, while others wanted to help somebody close.

Gardening and being outside also were some of the motives (CO1).

An interesting point was made by CO2, who pointed out to the difference of the work of volunteers and Interns, which actually underlined the Co-coordinators' decision to look for commitment in people who want to work in the Loyola garden. The example was that to build a community garden run by volunteers is possible; but if people want to learn, they need to commit for a longer period of time – for example, if they volunteer, even if they go and work a couple of days, it will be during a specific time of the plants' growth; next week or month a volunteer might not come – in this way they will be familiar only with this one and particular stage of the plant's growth.

In the documents discussed in the “Context” chapter, acceptance and care are both present when there is a talk about the volunteer initiatives in Concordia. Another feature that is often found with regard to volunteering is “learning”. It starts earlier with the tradition of the Jesuits, and flows in the more recent developments of the university, as acquiring of the Grey Nuns building. As mentioned in the newspapers at that time, the deed of Marguerite d'Youville fits in the tradition of Concordia in caring and giving access to the less fortunate.

Conclusions and Areas of Further Development

As a person whose roots are in a different culture that still maintains the tradition of the use of various herbs, I was interested to examine the relationships of students in Concordia with herbs and how it affects (if it does) their lives, in terms of thinking, feeling, and doing. By its nature, this type of learning is experiential. “Learners”, both

students – volunteers and the participants in the Internship Program, are actively involved in doing and have the opportunity to reflect later on the experience (Kolb, 1984). One common change of the perspective that all respondents acknowledged is their increased capacity and awareness to see and recognize herbs whereas before they have not been aware of their existence (many weeds actually are herbs) and their familiarity with the plant's physical features and characteristics such as aroma, colour and taste. At the same time, the ideas, gained from the experience, new knowledge and skills set the pattern for changes by critically reflecting on their assumptions and beliefs, as Mezirow (2000) observes in his theory. The Interns and Co-coordinators refer to deeper changes of “frame of reference” (Mezirow 2009), leading to more “ethical sensibility”, “awareness of body” and “intuitive knowledge” that comes with acknowledgement of our relationships with nature (Mezirow et al., 2009). As a result, they feel responsible towards our environment and society, a change mentioned by Thomas (2009) in his analyses of sustainable education. The role of critical reflection is crucial (Taylor 1997; Tilbury 2003; Mezirow et al., 2009; Thomas, 2009) for enabling the change in participants' perspective. It helps them to see where they are influenced and determined by conditions in their societies and cultures (Thomas, 2009). The conditions for critical thinking are embedded in the curriculum of the Internship Program (Self-healing is political), as well as result from the richness of the context (Projects Sustainable Concordia, the Greenhouse, Food Systems, People's Potato, CFS, etc.). Reflection and change result in further development of personal integrity, as described by Kolb (1984) and desire to take more responsibility for their own life, which is prerequisite for changing the society. In their stories, most of participants speak about the change they

have experienced in their relationship to herbs and share their intention to spread the knowledge they have to more people. Opportunity to take care of their own lives, in terms of increased autonomy from the structures and conditions of society and economy, is a leading theme. Besides mental reflection, the interviews spark with the tone of the human emotions, feelings, trust and support (Taylor 1997, Mezirow et al., 2009).

The “context”, which is a concern for the qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) in this particular case is extremely rich and complex. It is both an advantage and a challenge. As all the interviewees were either students at Concordia at the time, or recent graduates, it is imminent that their experiences will be affected and conditioned by the projects, politics and conditions of the University. As one of the Sustainable Concordia reports says, the universities need to lead by example the change in society (Campus sustainability – daring to be the change, 2003). Signing the Tailloires Declaration of university leaders for a sustainable future (ULSF, Signatory institutions, 2012) is only one, the more external sign of involvement. Sustainability and sustainable education gain more focus in the projects started by students. The social side of sustainability could be seen in the projects like People’s Potato and Le Frigo Vert, which, quite some time ago, decided to address sensitive topics like food, poverty and environment. They look deep in the reasons behind conflicting issues and look for alternatives. A more recent project, the Concordia Food systems examines food in terms of production and sustainability and creates the herb garden, which is the main site of the present research.

The Greenhouse with its long history is an example of the creative students’ management of the place. Through the years it has changed, opened its doors and became accessible to the students and the larger community who want to make their projects

there. The ideas born there have changed the image of Concordia university and particularly have paved the way for the herbs and the related more formal, credit based, Internship. Gradually through the years, thematically it became more inclusive, too – and moved from plants in terms of biology research to sustainability, organic, education and research and food security (Concordia Greenhouse Project, 2012).

It is important to acknowledge again that all the projects mentioned here have become reality with the constant work and support of student-volunteers. Through their deeds they connect to the covenant of the creators of the two main groups of founders of the University, as well as to the work of the Grey Nuns. Inclusiveness, deep care and the help offered to people in need are the threads that unite them. The Project Sustainable Concordia is an example of the link between university and society as well as a particular lens in looking at society and at its current issues.

In conclusion, it could be said that participants in the interviews that grow and work with the herbs within the settings of the Greenhouse and the Loyola Farm learn not only about plants and their life, but also about nature and our relationship with it, as well as about society and ways to change it. Critical thinking is an important element of their exploration. The educational aspect is strongly present in all the projects developed by the students in Concordia. In most cases, it is based on hands-on learning (experiential learning) and combines theory with practice into an inseparable unity. From another point of view, the learning happens outside of the strictly academic settings and could be described as informal. The research shows how quickly an idea about sharing the knowledge could develop into well organised yet flexible structure (the Greenhouse, the City Farm School), which takes advantage both from academic research and the rich

history of advanced existing projects and from ideas coming from the community. As such, it becomes a middle ground between the university and the community, open and welcoming to both of them (to researchers, for example, and to different groups of people out of university, to whom workshops are offered).

This special positioning allows the exploration of topics which are discussed and evoke strong interest, for which there is a demand and which are sometimes sensitive because of the present structure of the power in society, the law and the contemporary scientific paradigm. Challenging the status quo, the effects of these activities affect again both university and community, and become a catalyst for their change.

As a recommendation, the qualities of herbs and their effect for the health and wellbeing might be explored within the context of healthy food – as our food consists of plants (and herbs).

Some of the themes identified in this exploratory research project open up opportunities for future research. For example, one possible area is to look at the women's role in the preservation and transmission of herbal tradition in our 21st century and to see if and how it differs from the past. Another opportunity is connected to the City Farm School's activity and its evolving effect on community and university. It is interesting to explore how the knowledge, acquired during the Internships, is then disseminated to outside communities and what it is used for. One more topic could be to examine the work of Concordia Health Services and its effect on students in the light of contemporary medicine, alternative medicine, herbs and Campus sustainability assessments. There is also an interesting link to research between health and

sustainability, and the role and impact of herbs – what kind of changes happen not only in our life, but also in our environment and society when we use herbs.

These are only few of many possible directions for future study of interconnection and interaction between Concordia, herbs, students and society. The journey to account and illustrate the learning that happens through tradition at Concordia has been a long and arduous one, but I enjoyed every step of it. I hope others will pick up some of these leads and continue the praxis started by the exploratory research on which this thesis is based.

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Appendix A

Interview Script

(Although the interviews will be semi-structured, a list of possible questions will include):

- Why do you volunteer?
- Why you have chosen to work in the City Farm? (Sustainable Concordia offers different opportunities for volunteering)
- What knowledge / experience you had previously with herbs (before volunteering)?
- Does your family use herbs?
- Do some of your friends use herbs?
- If yes, in which way – for food, healing, etc.?
- What is your present usage of herbs?
- Have you changed something in your usage of herbs? Why?
- What new have you learnt by growing herbs?
- Is there any difference in the way you perceive herbs after you have started to volunteer? Describe it, please.
- What is the most interesting fact about herbs that you have learnt?
- What is your opinion for the importance of herbs – as food, for healing, or as part of maintaining sustainability?
- What does sustainability mean for you?
- According to you, what is the place of the herbs in our attempt for sustainable living and society?

And questions for the coordinator(s) of the project:

- What does your work in the City Farm include?
- What were the reasons to offer this Internship program – Medicinal usage of herbs?
- What value students see in this Internship program? Why do they enroll?
- Can you tell with what do students associate most often the herbs?
- Can you think of some changes observed in the behaviours of students after having some experience in the Program?
- How do you see the future development of the herb garden and projects, connected to herbs in Sustainable Concordia?
- Do you know what happens with this knowledge after the end of the Internship – in which directions it spreads?
- What value does the educational aspects of the City Farm School brings?

Appendix B

List of themes

1. Experience of being around one's own garden
 - a) I (will) have a little herb garden
 - b) To acknowledge that relationship
2. Slowly learning to speak the language of herbs
 - a) The biggest difference is they become real
 - b) Gaining confidence
 - c) Understanding of the complexity
 - d) Not just consuming, but really appreciating
 - e) Re-connect with nature - exciting!
3. Generations of knowledge that have been passed down
 - a. My mother told me
 - b. Spending time with grand-parents
 - c. Growing in the countryside
 - d. A friend who knows a lot about herbs
 - e. Oral history
4. Interested in alternative and traditional healing
 - a. Self-healing and helping a friend
 - b. Making teas & tinctures
 - c. Herbs, body, nutrition
 - d. Cooking with herbs
5. The capitalist, intensive way of healing (the political)
 - a. Pharmaceutical industrial complex
 - b. Taking the control away
 - c. Access and accessibility
 - d. Autonomy over body and health
6. Education brings people together
 - a. Learning by sharing
 - b. Community
 - c. Experienced-based learning
 - d. The Greenhouse – ultimate source of education
 - e. The City Farm School
7. It's coming back
 - a. People become more interested in self healing
 - b. Increase of usage of natural products and herbs

- c. Access to alternative health care practitioners
8. Add to something greater than yourself
- a. Run by volunteers
 - b. Acceptance and care
 - c. Recognizing the work