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Bachelor thesis

# Making Sense Of Intercultural Miscommunication

*A case study on Project Clean Uluwatu*



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## Abstract

This study looks into the field of intercultural miscommunication and misunderstandings on small multicultural Non Profit Organization (NPO) seen from the expats point of view. It is a study based on a qualitative method-design, including a micro-ethnographic study and qualitative interviews on a small NPO on Bali, Indonesia called Project Clean Uluwatu (PCU) that contain volunteers from all over the world. These misunderstandings and miscommunications that occurred on PCU was mostly between local people born on Bali and foreign people working on PCU, due to many reasons, starting with the rapid pace of globalization and that culture don't evolve in the same speed. Plausible explanations for this, that are raised in this thesis, is that people make sense of events in different ways, especially if the individuals within a misunderstanding belong to both a high context culture and a low context culture and aby that communicate in different ways. This thesis also explain them through Karl Wieck's sensemaking perspective by applying 7 properties that describes how individuals make sense out of miscommunication by perceiving the event in different ways due to individuals former knowledge, their intentions and own identity.

## Keywords

Intercultural communication, misunderstandings, miscommunication, Sensemaking, High Context and Low Context cultures.

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# 1. Introduction

Culture shocks, haven't we all encountered them? We all know, who works or has worked with people from other backgrounds that it's not always enough to talk the same language to really understand each other. Some words are stronger in other cultures and promises are perceived differently. We all have our own background with values and norms that are different from most people on the planet.

Today we live in a world where people, products and ideas have been moved to a more global level, this requires an increase in communication to also move in the same direction. Globalization has led to the fact that interest in some languages has increased whilst some have almost disappeared and many people feel they need to speak English in addition to their mother tongue.

One of many places where people from all over the world are gathering, is in non profit organizations (NPOs) that often contain people from all over the world, by accepting international volunteers and are trying to communicate with local people. Another sector that is increasing is Voluntary Organizations and they will therefore play a greater role on the global stage.

When people from all over the world meet to collaborate on a project, it can often cause both problems and opportunities. This happens especially when people come from different cultures and have different normalities of how they envision life should be. Due to this, people are trying to gain a more thorough understanding of these encounters, people do this in different ways, this is something that Karl Weick calls Sensemaking.

In these multicultural organizations, miscommunication is not unusual. This thesis will look into this field of intercultural communication and try to understand these miscommunications through Karl Weicks Sensemaking perspective from the expats point of view.

*- This is to make sense out of intercultural miscommunication and misunderstandings.*

## 1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to explore intercultural communication and to focus on small multicultural Non Profit Organizations (NPOs). I have chosen to focus on a NPO because they tend to work and interact in a different way than a profit organization (Mikkelsen. 2012). Also, the people that are working or volunteering at these places have the focus on helping instead of making profit and have by that their mind settings different. This is an interesting perspective on intercultural communication because most scholars tend to focus on intercultural business communication.

According to Mikkelsen (2012. p. 113) NPOs also present a specific type of cultural base on institutional levels. This is because they are committed to a specific social mission and most people involved hold their interest side by side with the organization's social goals and mission. That mission is to contribute and make the world a better place. Most NPOs also tend to be less hierarchical than other organizations.

Intercultural communication can lead to devastating consequences if it is not handled in the correct way or bring the organization forward if handled properly, by receiving more views on a problem and therefore will this be an interesting topic to investigate and be of interest for the field of Media and Communication science.

My knowledge interest will in this thesis later on be to expand my knowledge in these miscommunications that occurred by see if they can be understood through different existing theories, like high and low context cultures, globalization and the sensemaking perspective, and use Karl Weicks definition which is perspectives that will be explained more in depth in chapter 2.

This subject is relevant first and foremost to investigate, because there is limited research in the communication field about the combination of culture and Sensemaking in NPOs, seen from only the expats point of view.

I believe that these terms can work well together to structure an understanding of miscommunication.

## 1.2 Research question

For the reasons described above, my main research question will be:

- How is miscommunication described and perceived in a multicultural, small, nonprofit organization, through the perspective of the expats, working on the organization?

## 1.3 Place of the study

This study was made on a NPO called Project Clean Uluwatu (PCU). This organization has its base on Bali, Indonesia in the village called Uluwatu.

PCU is a project that aims to restore and preserve Uluwatus ecosystem that, in this moment, is being destroyed rapidly by tourists and locals due to increasing population growth and tourism in the area and the infrastructure can't keep up with this rapid increase. Indonesia doesn't have a fully functional garbage collection system or a reliable sewage system and this means that sewage and garbage is going directly into the ocean and therefore destroying the environment. PCU is managed by local business owners, residents, and volunteers. The organization is well established within the Uluwatu community, ensuring ongoing success for the project. Uluwatu is a well known, iconic place for surfers and in 2013 an estimated 35.3 million USD was generated by surf tourism in Uluwatu and more than 500 people visited Uluwatu each day (Conservation international Indonesia. 2013). I will in chapter 4 explain more in depth about PCU.

I chose to do my research on this organization because it fits the criteria of what I plan to investigate in this thesis. PCU has international volunteers working closely with the local population, the majority of the people working there are expats and it is a small nonprofit organization so I have had the opportunity to gain a more educated understanding of how the organization functions during my limited time there.

### **1.3.1 Indonesia and Bali**

In Indonesia 222 million people populate an area of almost 2 million square kilometers, it makes Indonesia the world's fourth most populous nation. The majority of people are Muslims, 86%, but it also common to be Protestant, Roman Catholic, Hindu or Buddhist. In Indonesia they speak Bahasa Indonesia, but English, Dutch and Javanese is also spoken on different places within the country. (National Geographic. 2014)

Bali is an island in Indonesia but is very different from the rest of the country. In the last 15 years, Bali has become a bastion for travelers and here, people from all over the world gather. The religion is different from the rest of Indonesia, in Bali the majority are Hindus. The Balinese way of life is filled with a lot of rituals and takes up a lot of hours of everyday life, they also have many holidays to celebrate different events.

Indonesia is a developing nation and has become a bastion for NPOs. Especially Bali, which is no exception from the rest of the country. Since the bombing in 2002, numerous aid organizations have moved in to assist Bali with its economic recovery and that's one of the reasons that I decided to do my research and study there. (Bali Spirit. 2014)

### **1.3.2 Limitations**

This thesis will look at the expats point of view, and not from the whole perspective, including the local's point of view of the miscommunications or misunderstandings that occurred on PCU. This is due to many reasons, first and foremost to language problems and time limits. Locals talk fluent Bahasa Indonesia and Balinese, but only little English and an interpreter would be necessary, but even then I believe that I would not fully understand the depth of their point of view. My time limit on Bali and on PCU also contributed on choosing to only to look at the expats perception of misunderstandings and focus on getting a more throughout understanding on their side.



## 2 Theory

I will in this chapter present studies that have already been made in the area of intercultural communication, miscommunication and misunderstandings and present Karl Weicks sensemaking theory.

### 2.1 Globalization

We live today in a world where products, ideas and people have moved over borders to the global level. This is called *globalization*. Globalization and the breakthrough of IT, with internet as the major one, have gone hand in hand to clarify the fact that contemporary organizations must find new effective ways to manage the increasing diversity among employees as well as customers. (Larsson. 2010. p. 73)

Globalization has led to both advantages and challenges. Many commentators that talk about globalization will say that it leads to development and others argue that it's, for an example, is bad for the environment, increases inequality and weakens cultural diversity by promoting some cultures while others fade (Miller. 2012. p. 3).

Globalization has also led to the fact that the interest in some languages has increased while others have almost disappeared and many people feel the need to speak English in addition to their mother tongue.

Globalization is a broad term that could be described like worldwide interconnectedness, and include everything from moving natural resources, trading goods, human labor, information, capital and also diseases to a global stage. (Samovar. 2009. p 2-3)

Globalization is something that has affected Uluwatu a great amount and without globalization, PCU would probably not exist.

### 2.2 Intercultural communication

To understand what intercultural communication is, you first have to define what communication is and understand its importance for everyday life to work.

Communication is everything that we mediate to others or to ourselves, through language, emotions, feelings, acts, values and experiences. It is when we are trying to mediate a message that we are communicating by actions that represent our thoughts

and ideas, good communication is when the receiver perceives the message as the sender intended it to be perceived. It is also of big importance to understand that communication is not only the spoken or written language and what you say to another person, a message is constructed through a social context and through various channels, like gestures, distance, smell, eye contact, where and when we are saying a certain sentence and how it is said and so on, plays a great part of how the message will be received. (Nilsson, Waldemarson. 2010. P. 11-13)

Another crucial part of how a message is received is also from the cultural aspect. This is one of the aspects that I have decided to explore in this thesis.

Culture is a concept that is usually defined by a set of rules and routines that a group of people have together. Fundamental values and behavior patterns about family, work, life and death, society, knowledge, roles and relations acknowledge that culture that you live in. Culture is something you learn and is not something that you are born with, it is a part of your socialization process. It is also important to remember that culture is a continually changing thought process and are not stagnant. (Nilsson, Waldemarson. 2010. P. 122-124)

Even if culture is not stagnant, it changes slowly. Talking about culture in terms of frontstage and backstage on individual, the frontstage is faster and more dynamic to changes, while the backstage moves slower and have a deeper root within the individuals on their values. This mean that culture can adapt outside elements easy, but core values are hard to change and takes time. (Samovar. 2009. p 39)

I have in this thesis chosen to define culture through a social constructive perspective. This means that culture is understood from a connected system of beliefs, norms and values that has a constant impact on individual's views of life and how to make personal choices. This is something that is always in motion and consistently changing through socializing with people. By receiving imprints from other people and projecting our own to others makes culture differentiate in a constant flow over borders. (Larsson. 2010)

When you talk about communication and culture, you often associate it with cultural clashes as well. There are numerous examples of different cultural clashes and these

may include different views of the hierarchy like gender and age within a group, different greeting ceremonies and different body language to name a few. When cultural clashes occur, problems can be created for the organizations in the form of misunderstanding, things take longer and work will not be as effective, this can lead to stagnation. Here communication is an essential tool to create positive and effective collaborations between people, which is called *Intercultural communication*.

The words, Intercultural Communication, were first formulated and used by the anthropologist Edward Hall who in 1946 was working for the foreign service institute in the US and was focusing on the exchange of information across cultural boundaries. (Larsson. 2010.)

If Intercultural communication is handled correctly, it should lead to pushing the organization forward with the added bonus of understanding different perspectives and solutions on how to solve problems etc. Emma Meurling writes in her report, called *Mångfald för ökad lönsamhet* [Diversity for increased profitability] about the importance of making investments on diversity in a workplace. She writes about how a multicultural workplace leads to creativity and helps the organization gain a broader perspective by not having a homogenetic environment and people that think alike. (Meurling. 2009)

An important part, when you study intercultural communication is that different cultures have different expectations and that can often lead to different perceptions when you interpret a message from another person. Some things that you take for granted are not obvious to everyone and that can lead to confusion and misunderstandings. This is something that I will explore more in the following section. (Nilsson, Waldemarson. 2010. P. 124-125)

Because I have chosen to make my thesis on a multicultural organization, Intercultural communication will by that be a prominent theme throughout this thesis.

### **2.2.1 Language in Intercultural communication**

Language is a big part of our everyday life communication. Martin and Nakayama (2014) wrote in their book on intercultural communication about how important it is to

understand the linguistics field in intercultural communication and how it can be viewed as a primary barrier to be able to interact with each other. They also write that language is so much more than your local tongue; it's also how to communicate and build relationships with people from all walks of life. Two people can both understand English, but still have language barriers, as they have different backgrounds and put the emphasis on different words or look at different connotations in different words or phrases.

Language also helps us think and steer our thoughts. Some languages have several words to describe snow, while some have none. This makes the vocabulary different in different language. This also makes direct translation hard though you need to understand the culture to understand the language. (Samovar. 2009. p. 230)

When talking about language in this sense, The Sapir- Whorf hypothesis is often used. This mean that a person's every thought cannot fully be understood by another person using a different language, because the mindset is strongly influenced by one's mother tongue. This should not be taken literally, instead use it carefully, to see that language can have influence on your thoughts. (Jandt. 2004)

### **2.2.2 high and low context cultures**

When to identify and make an informed analysis of organizational culture, you can use the definition *high respectively low context cultures*, a theory by Hall. A high context culture is characterized by that all individuals within the culture are taking cultural habits and knowledge more for granted. This should not affect meeting people who have different cultural views and also come from a different upbringing. It is not necessary to say things that nevertheless apparent from the context. It is also offensive to talk about what you mean and it's characterized by ambiguity and allusions to past experiences. Instead people understand the communication through their surrounding and in the context. Members in low-context cultures, on the other hand, assumes that their own cultural specificities are unknown to members of other cultures. People in a low-context culture expect a high level of detail when they communicate, both in the visual, verbal and written communication, this mean that people need direct and immediate communication to understand each other. People like native English speakers, Scandinavians, and individuals that speak German are a few example that usually is known as low context cultures, while Indonesia, Brazil and Arabic countries

are known as high context cultures. When talking about low context and high context cultures, it's of importance to remember that this theory has had critics due to its roughness of generalization and that this theory should be used with that in mind.

(Samovar. 2009. p. 215-217)

Time is something that is of big impact in high and low context cultures, and Hall defines two kinds of groups, referred as Monochronic people and Polychronic people. Monochronic people belongs to the low context culture and tend to do one thing at the time and are more committed at deadlines. Polychronic people instead tend to do many things at the time, are more inclined to change plans and belong to the high context culture. (Hall. 1990)

### **2.2.3 Critics**

It is also important to acknowledge when you study intercultural communication that early scholars within the intercultural communication area have, since second world war been extremely careful when studies have been made in the area of culture due to its closeness to racist values and they don't want to partake in studies that can be connected to that area or be used in the wrong way by people with a racist ideology. They believed that studies in the cultural area, if handled wrong can lead to ammunition for people that already have racist values and by these persecutions. It has by that not been opportune to make research in and about the differences between people, neither in terms of culture or gender. The search for differences has been seen as a desire to rank and evaluate people based on these differences, something that can lead to racism.

Today, scholars have started to change the view due to globalization but it's still a very important aspect to consider. (Larsson. 2010 p. 62)

Critics have also been held to Hofstede's, who is one of the main pioneers within the intercultural communication area. It was he that started to generalize and categorize cultures in a simplified manner, this is something that I have paid close attention to during this study. That all people that are interviewed or a part of this thesis are individuals but may share some collective values, cultures and that you always have to be careful when generalize. (Larsson. 2010. p. 71) A frequently used word when talking about generalize and categorize cultures in a simplified manner within the field of intercultural communication is *Stereotyping*. This is a term that intended to group

people which can be based on prejudices, to easier handle your everyday life by dealing with the unknown. (Samovar. 2009. p.170-176)

The word *Ethnocentrism* is also frequently used word when you study intercultural communication and is a pragmatic term that means that all humans put their own values and culture before others that are deviant. This is a term that I have kept in mind throughout the duration of my research to stand critic to my own culture and norms that I, like everyone else, take for granted, even if this is hard. (Nilsson, Waldemarson 2010. p. 122)

## 2.3 Sensemaking theory

*Sensemaking* is a theory made by Karl Weick, and that is one of the theories that I will explore throughout this thesis to understand miscommunication and misunderstandings. Sensemaking is the process of making a meaning to different experiences and other events, that people encounter. The process of sensemaking involves three main moves, these are perception, interpretation, and action that occurs in an ongoing cycle of revisions (Weick. 1979)

Sensemaking has two core assumptions, the first defines sensemaking as the social construction of meaning. This means that people look at their environment for clues and signals on how to explain different experiences, by making meaning through social interactions in groups. The second core assumption is that thinking and acting define one another (Weick. 2005).

In Weick's book *Sensemaking in organizations* (1995) Weick describes the social aspects of sensemaking in organizations and made a framework on how individuals and organizations try and make sense of their environment. He wrote in that book about 7 properties as guidelines on how we can understand sensemaking in organizations and by that understand miscommunication and misunderstandings within organizations.

The 7 properties;

- Social processes,

To make sense of events, we go back to our memories to find meanings that we

constructed from past experiences and interactions in society with other people. Sensemaking is a process that you make through other individuals and is not a private and individual process though you can't create meaning in vacuum situations and without interactions.

- Retrospective,  
Is to make meaning of events by going back in your mind and rely on past experiences to make it more tangible. This means that you compare similar events to the present one to make a more understandable meaning.
- Reliance on clues,  
This is the part of sensemaking that makes people more open to focus on clues and extract certain parts of a past event to make sense of the given situation. This means that some people extract and focus on some particular elements of a situation and completely ignore other clues, based on past events, rules, norms, regulations and individuals own values and beliefs to make sense.
- Plausibility,  
Sensemaking is also built on plausibility rather than accuracy. This means that sensemaking is not about finding the truth, it is rather to create a plausible explanation to explore new situations and circumstances. In time, this will help present new context which could mean different situations and each person can form their own decision from the same situation.
- Identity,  
In order to make sense out of a situation we also look at the roots of ourselves and our own identity. Identity is constructed through interactions and that defines who we think we are. Through this is how we interpret and make meanings of different events. How we see the world and ourselves is an important part to remember when understanding sensemaking.
- Ongoing,  
It is also important to realize that sensemaking is a continual process.

- Enactment,  
Enactment means that individuals create their own reality and is the *activity of making that which is sensed* as Weick describes it.

(Weick. 1995)

Because understanding different events and encounters are an essential part of communication, the sensemaking perspective is an important issue of both language and talk. Because situations, organizations, and environments are simply talked into existence, my approach in this thesis will be to look at sensemaking when miscommunication and misunderstanding occurs. (Mikkelsen. 2012 p.66)

## 2.4 What is misunderstandings/miscommunication?

According to Sven Windahl, Benno Signitzer and Jean T Olsen (2009), communication gains many advantages. This can get people to acknowledge a specific problem by setting an agenda, it can keep the issues alive and fill in the knowledge gap to name a few. But if one uses the communication in the wrong way it can lead to confusion and misinformation. If you do not have good communication in an organization, it can create more damage rather than help. This can lead to more *miscommunication* or *misunderstandings* throughout the set up.

Miscommunication and misunderstanding are two words that are closely connected to each other and are hard to talk about separately.

If you look at the difference of miscommunication and misunderstanding we first need to define the words.

- Miscommunication - to communicate mistakenly, unclearly, or inadequately.
- Misunderstanding - failure to understand correctly; mistake as to meaning or intent

(Dictionary. 2015).

This means that the word miscommunication has more focus on the sender and the message of the communication that went wrong and misunderstanding is more about how the message is understood by the receiver and how the receiver perceives the message that was sent.



Because these two words complement each other in a good way of understanding when communication goes wrong, I have decided to use both expressions in this thesis.

Miscommunication and misunderstandings can be seen as a form of conflict, but I have chosen to see it in another direction. Though a conflict can have other dimensions than just misunderstandings and is or can be just a part of a conflict. I also see that conflict is a broader subject with more dimensions. I will by that only focus on the communication part.

Miscommunication is a field of study that is of interest in various disciplines, like theory of communication, ethnomethodology, intercultural studies, discourse analysis, and many more, (Barbara. 2012)

## 2.5 Organizational culture and structure

To understand misunderstandings and miscommunication in intercultural NPOs, you also have to understand the organization, its culture and structure.

The book *Hur moderna organisationer fungerar* [how modern organizations work] by Dag Ingvar Jacobsen and Jan Thorsvik (2008) different ways of communication and organizational structure is described and I will use their book with different organizational theories to describe Project Clean Uluwatu in this thesis.

When you discuss communication in organizations, you frequently put *formal* and *informal communication* against each other. Formal communication is when people involved with the organization have a strict hierarchic system that all staff follow. The individuals communicate vertically and horizontally, this follows certain patterns in a more direct method. When you look at informal communication instead, you will see that patterns of communication are not so strict and doesn't adhere to the hierarchical system. The communication does not have to be just vertical and horizontal, it can go in any kind of direction. (Torsvik. 2008)

To describe an organization, you often refer to a *centralized organization* or a *decentralized organization*. This is to describe the decision making process and how

high in the hierarchic decisions are made in the organization. A centralized organization makes decisions high in the hierarchy and doesn't leave much influence to the workers, while the decentralized does try to involve everyone in the organization within the decision making process by moving the power from the top. A decentralized organization often uses an informal way of communication as well (Torsvik. 2008 p. 90)

The advantages with a decentralized organization are many, here I have listed the following:

- You can use the knowledge and experience that the subordinates and workers have about local conditions.
- It promotes flexibility and quick adjustment in an organization.
- It motivates and stimulates subordinates to work more creatively.
- It strengthens the subordinates feeling of responsibility.

The disadvantages with a decentralized organization is, for example that the subordinates easily make decisions that only are benefiting the local section where they work and don't look to fulfill the objective of the whole organization, this is called suboptimisation. (Torsvik. 2008. p 92)

Another way of describing organizational communication and culture is to talk about the *Human Research approach* (HR). Human Resources are characterised by the following;

- The content of both the communication and tasks are social- and innovation oriented.
- The communication goes in all directions of the organization and are group orientated.
- It uses all the available communication channels.
- Communication style is both formal and informal, but leans more towards the informal side.

(Miller. 2012. p.51)

Torsvik also talks about different communication channels and have ranked them through how rich they are on information. The one that is least rich in information is

formal reports, later comes letters, emails, phone calls, video conferences, and finally direct talks are that are the most rich on information. (Torsvik. 2008 p. 299)

### 3 Method

To achieve an understanding of intercultural communication on small NPOs, I've decided to make a case study on Project Clean Uluwatu (PCU), a small NPO on Bali. This study is based on qualitative methods. I have chosen this type of method because my research aims to look at the depth and make an understanding of intercultural communication and by that I don't need quantitative data. To understand specific situations and investigate the field of sensemaking theory, you have to use a qualitative method to get a deeper understanding.

The main aim of this research is to look at the grassroots level between staff, volunteers and locals. This is why this thesis is only a studied on what happens on the place where PCU operates and not on the global communications by the organization.

Before coming to Indonesia, I decided to contact the Swedish embassy in Indonesia and got in contact with a women named Amreta Sidik. Amreta is Indonesian and I used her advice to help me locate the perfect location to carry out my research. She advised me that Bali would be the best place in Indonesia for numerous reasons, especially because it has many NPOs and also many international people, compared to the rest of Indonesia. According to Amreta, the rest of Indonesia does not have as many international volunteers as they have in Bali.

I also used *grounded theory*, which means that I have made observations, email-interviews and face to face interviews until I reached the stage of not needing more data to get an understanding about the situation. In this case until I felt that there were not much more information to collect and more persons to interview to get a broader or/and better perspective, because all the information was starting to look the same. (Bryman. 2011)

### 3.1 Case study as a research strategy

This study is made on one specific organization, PCU, and that is called to make a *case study*. A case study is characterized by different strategies, including the following;

- A focus on the interrelationships that constitute the context of a specific entity, such as an organization, event, phenomenon, or person,
- Analysis of the relationship between the contextual factors and the entity being studied, and
- The explicit purpose of using those insights, of the interactions between contextual relationships and the entity in question, to generate theory and/or contribute to extant theory.

Case study is also often referred as a research strategy rather than a method or a methodology. This is because a case study cannot be defined as one single method that implies a research tool, such as surveys, interviews, or observation. Even if I chose to incorporate these methods.

*“A case consists of a focus on the link between a specific entity and its supposed contextual interrelationships, and on what the link can tell us about either the uniqueness of the case or its generalizability to comparable relationships”*

(Wiebe. 2010 p.32-33)

This means that I have made research on one particular organization, PCU, to make this as an example of how a small, NPO, works and handle miscommunication.

### 3.2 Micro-ethnographic study

To get the information that is needed, to see how communication and misunderstandings occur on a multicultural organization, I have chosen to use a participatory observation method and made an *micro-ethnography study* on PCU. An ethnographic study is when you come to a place and observe and see how people act and communicate with each other and you do this under a specific and long time to get an understanding about the real depth in how people interact. (Bryman. 2011 p. 378). According to Bryman you cannot make a fully ethnographic study in just a few

weeks. However, you can do a micro-ethnographic study during this limited time that I have to make my research, and have by that chosen to make that. A micro-ethnographic study is when you make an ethnographic study but just focus on one specific aspect of the organization or field that you are in, in my case the communication. (Bryman. 2011. p 379)

I also used an open way of doing my ethnographic, and that means that I told people at PCU that I'm doing research on intercultural communication and did not observe in secret. There are both pros and cons of making an open micro-ethnographic study, the negative with being open is that it can result that people are not telling some things, because it would not be good for the organization or other hidden aspects that people don't want to share if they know that they are studied or observed. Meanwhile, you cannot use interviews or make notes during a hidden observation and there is an ethical problem of course as well, that's why I decided to make an open micro-ethnographic study (Bryman. 2011. p. 382)

To get access to make a micro-ethnographic study, I contacted PCU through e-mail before arriving in Bali and made an agreement that I would have access if I helped out with volunteering a few times, which I believe was only benefiting my research to get a deeper understanding in the real culture at PCU. I helped out with gardening and other small beneficial simple tasks. (Bryman. 2011 p. 384)

I made my micro-ethnographic study during two weeks in April, 2015 at PCU, and lived in an apartment next to the office, so I could see when they were opened, though they did not have strict opening hours. I looked at the normal routine and asked a lot of questions about everything from communication to how things work in Uluwatu. I followed the staff, the manager Curtis and co-coordinator Timm, when they were doing different tasks to get an understanding on how PCU operates, which persons that are included in the organization and what role they have.

During this time I also looked after key-persons that are of importance for the organization to later make face to face interviews and email-interviews with.

It is also important, according to Bryman in what role you are taking as an ethnographer. He describes in his book four different types of participation; complete participant, participant as observer, observer as participant and complete observer. I

decided to take the role as participant as observer, that means that I have taken the role as a participant in PCU but made observations at the same time, the important thing to be aware of is that it's easy to get a too strong identification with the organization with is called "going native". I have avoided that, by always keeping in mind that I'm there to observe and make a study, not as an volunteer. (Bryman. 2011. p. 389)

The things that I observed were the daily routines, what people that were involved in the organization, both in the inner circle and outer were doing and acting. I observed Curtis and Timm talking to local people working with new projects for PCU. I also looked at different information that is handed out to new volunteers, like guidebooks. Other information that were accessible and looked at where posters, webpages, flyers and so on to get a comprehensive understanding of the organization culture, both in Uluwatu and on PCU. All this observation was later written down in the end of the day or during the day in an observation diary on my computer.

### 3.3 Qualitative interviews

I have, to compliment the micro-ethnographic study, make *qualitative interviews* with persons in contact with PCU or in the Uluwatu area. Interviews are the most useful method in qualitative science and have by that I used that type of method to base most of my result on. (Bryman. 2011)

The difference from quantitative interviews are mostly the structure. I have had just a few, open questions that I have let the person that is being interviewed talk freely about and then, if needed, asked follow-up questions that could be of interest. This is called a semistructured interview (Bryman. 2011 p. 414) I had also the possibility to interview one person more than one time, if I in a later stage had follow-up questions, something that is not possible in a quantitative interview. (Bryman. 2011 p. 413)

I decided in the beginning of my research to do interviews both face to face, but also expanded with qualitative email-interviews with people that were not able to meet up, due to geographic distance.

Before the interviews I made a question guide (Appendix 1), with subjects that I want to talk about, but not made closed questions, which mean that I never had "yes or no"-questions, instead I used open questions where the respondents could talk freely about a

subject, what they felt where of interest for my topic about misunderstandings and miscommunications.

I made two different question guides, one for volunteers and one for the staff. I grouped the questions for the volunteers in 4 categories; Background, Describe your time at PCU, Miscommunications and misunderstandings and Description of working with people from other countries.

The question guide for the staff was 9 pre made questions that where more going in to the deep about miscommunications and misunderstandings during their time at PCU.

This was because I wanted the people that are getting interviewed to talk openly about their experiences and to know that their views are respected. By always having a question guide with me to steer the conversations in the right direction and not to forget to ask certain, direct questions and at the same time, helped a lot.

In qualitative interviews you can acknowledge 7 stages;

- Thematisation, the purpose of the investigation and why and what.
- Planning, planning for the entire investigation with regard to the knowledge that I'm interested in and the investigations moral consequences.
- Interview, conducted using an interview guide.
- Transcription, transfer from spoken language to written language.
- Analysis Verification, generalizability, reliability and validity.
- Reporting / interpretation

(Kvale, 1997, p. 85).

I have followed this 7 stages when I have made the interviews, both face to face and by email in this thesis.

Something I noticed early in my observations and interviews was that PCU have a “relaxed” culture on their organization (see chapter 4.3) and most material came out from the subjects when the recorder was not on, because I think that it made them uncomfortable and nervous. I solved this by writing down everything they said after the recorder was off, after the interview in a document together with the observations.

### 3.3.1 Sample

The people I have selected to interview are chosen by my observations during my micro-ethnographic study at PCU. I have selected key persons during my observations and made them represent the entire organization and used a goal-oriented sample. This means that I chose people that are the right one to answer my research questions and have not taken random people to interview or select individuals by coincidence.

(Bryman. 2011. p. 434).

I have made interviews with both staff, volunteers and people living in Uluwatu and this study is based in the following interviews:

<u>Amount</u>	<u>Role</u>	<u>Type of interview</u>
2	Staff members	face to face
1	Uluwatu resident	face to face
1	former volunteer	face to face
5	former volunteers	email
-----		
2	former volunteers	no response

*table. no 1*

total: 9 interviews, 2 no respond.

I have made interviews both face to face with some people and some interviews have been by email, because the people that I wanted to interview are no longer on Bali and are former volunteers of PCU. This decision was made during my observations because I was at PCU on “low”-season and there was not so many volunteers at that time. The e-mail addresses to ex volunteers are handed to me by staff at PCU. I will in this thesis referee to both email-interviews and face to face interviews when the single term *interview* is used.

I sent out emails to eight former volunteers and got replies from six of them. Most of the people that have answered wrote back extensive answers and were glad to help. Just one response was short, due to time limits from the former volunteer.

Two of the former volunteers also suggested to meet up in Bali in the end of May. This is because they were coming back to PCU and Bali, but due to my time limits I had to decline this offer.



The people that were former volunteers that were email-interviewed were aged between 20-26 years old, both female and male and were all expats, from all over the world, including France, Russia, Spain, Singapore, The US and Netherlands. Most of the volunteer respondents were at PCU for 3-6 months. One was there for 6 weeks and most arrived late 2014-beginning of 2015, only one of the respondents arrived late in 2013.

There are two face to face interviews that are made at the office of PCU with staff members, with the only two persons that are working there on daily basis. I chose to make it in their office because it's a place where they feel comfortable and are in the right mind settings.

Note that during my time as an observer, I also talked and made mini face to face interviews with a lot of different people in contact within the organization, both permanent residents, that did not grow up in Uluwatu and locals, those people are not taken into account in table no 1 and are instead included in the micro-ethnography study.

### 3.4 Method problems

To use a qualitative research design rather than a quantitative design will make this research face difficulties at a later stage, making it more complicated to generalize on a global level, because every organization has its own culture and their own methods of solving problems. (Bryman. 2011)

However, because this thesis needed a deeper insight into how the miscommunication is treated and handled, it will be necessary to use a qualitative method and the survey will be used cautiously when it comes to generalization.

Observation can also be difficult in such a short time, because it takes a long time to be able to feel the culture of an organization and gain a deep insight into how they deal with any problems. I have therefore chosen to complement these potential knowledge gaps with interviews and recognize my limits that a micro-ethnographic study has compared to a full ethnographic study.

I have also faced difficulties in my observations. I arrived at a time when there were not so many volunteers and not so many responsibilities to fulfil for the organization, which made my observations slow and it was harder to find key persons to interview face to face. I solved this by making interviews via email, but I understand that I would have got more information by doing it face to face, where it's easier to expand answers and come with quick follow up questions. An advantage that I saw with making interviews by email was that the respondent could think longer about their answer and by that come up with better answers when they could prepare theirs answers. I could also get more direct answers without so much disturbance, like pauses to think, reformulate sentences or other kind of noise that a recorder and a face to face interview withhold.

My planning for my thesis, before coming to PCU, was also to make focus group-interviews with volunteers, but due to low season, there were not enough volunteer to make this happen. This made me remake my plan when I arrived.

### **3.4.1 Validity and reliability of the research**

Validity is an expression that is used when you look at how relevant the research is. It is to look if the collected data is for the sole purpose of the research and also if the data is connected to the theories in the area. If this all is connected then you reached high validity for your research, something that I been striving for in this thesis. It is a quality process that is ongoing throughout all the stages of the knowledge production.

Reliability is how trustworthy the method and the whole research is. For that you have to look over collective data, the theories and the way that the data has been chosen to be analyzed and then qualify the quality and quantity that said data will withhold.

Though my research questions have the focus on a social constructive point of view, what the respondents feel and have experienced, my thesis doesn't have to be a perception of reality, instead it is how the respondents experienced the reality that is of importance and interest. Valid knowledge claims emerges when competing interpretations and policy options discussed. Validation becomes a matter of choosing between competing and falsifiable interpretations and will ultimately rest on the researcher's craftsmanship. (Kvale, 1997, p. 210)

After understanding that a qualitative method is hard to generalize, I have for that reason been carefully selective with that section of the thesis. In this section it's also of importance to be not be afraid to self criticize, something I have in mind the whole part of my research.

An important aspect to acknowledge, when looking at the validity and reliability, is how trustworthy the interviews in this thesis are. Though the observations were only based throughout two weeks and no volunteers were there at that time, most of the thesis is based on the complimenting interviews. The first question you should ask yourself is how honest the respondents have been. Miscommunication and misunderstandings can be a sensitive subject for staff members, although people always want to show the best side of their organizations and themselves and refuse to talk indifferently about different situations. Though the respondents have answered in similar ways about specific events, and that the staff at PCU have admitted own flaws in communication my perception of the situation, is that they have been honest. The second question to ask is if I have understood the respondents in an accurate way.

## 4 Result and empiricism

This chapter will present the empiricism that was collected on PCU. The data from both email-interviews, face to face interviews and observations will be described and summarized to form an understanding and a comprehensive picture of the organization. In this chapter the organization structure and culture on PCU will be presented and different miscommunications and misunderstandings will be described through the eyes of the respondents. The empiricism in this chapter is from my observations during my time on Bali, April-May 2015, if nothing else is referred.

### 4.1 The expansion of Uluwatu

To understand the miscommunications and the misunderstandings that occurred on PCU, you first have to understand the background and the current situation of the environment that the expats were working in.

Uluwatu is a village that is positioned in the most Southern point of Bali, its center is based on the cliffs by the ocean where one of Bali's most famous surfing spots is located. It is a place that has expanded from only having one single small restaurant (warung), surrounded by only nature in the late 80s, to expand and have the whole cliffs covered in shops, restaurants and guesthouses today. This expansion is happening throughout Bali and during my observations, locals described how the large road running through Kuta, which is crowded with shopping malls, big hotels and shops, called Sunset road, didn't exist a few years ago and were previously only rice fields. Now the whole coast is also covered in newly built, expansive resorts, places that were deserted beaches just a few years ago.

One respondent describes how Uluwatu started to change rapidly in 2002/2004 when internet started to spread. This led to the fact that local people in Uluwatu could attract more tourists to the area by using internet as a marketing tool. Today almost all shops have a Facebook page and a website, which makes information about Uluwatu spread to other countries faster and this makes more visit the area and expand the tourism.

Everywhere you go in Uluwatu, there is construction ongoing to form new buildings. According to KÄLLA, 500 people visit Uluwatu every day, which is an enormous amount of persons for a small village as Uluwatu.

## 4.2 Organization structure at PCU

When you look at how miscommunication is described and perceived in a multicultural, small, nonprofit organization, through the perspective of the expats, working on PCU, you have to understand the organization.

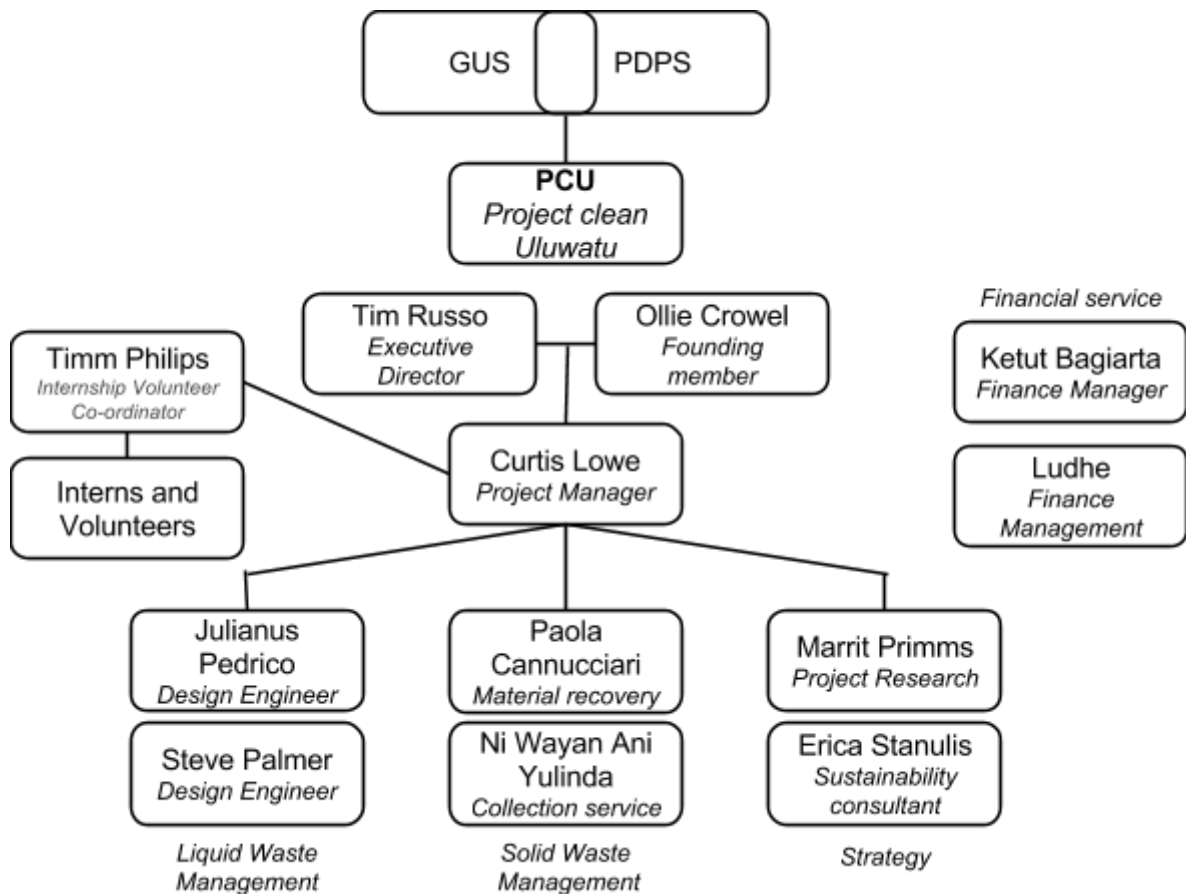
To summarize Project Clean Uluwatu, it is a small and open non profit organization that works towards a cleaner and more eco-friendly environment. The structure of PCU is very decentralized and patterns of a strong hierarchy can't be found. PCU tries to look at what all people can contribute with and are always open for new ideas and alternative ways of thinking to improve the situation in Uluwatu. The organization is built by volunteers and locals together and rely on donations every month to finance their cause. Further in this chapter, a more extensive description of the organization will be described.

### 4.2.1 Organization chart of PCU

PCU is founded by Persatuan Dagang Pantai Suluban (PDPS) and GUS Foundation to help PCU with infrastructure, get access to land in Uluwatu to build their organization and with help with oversight and financial services to be a successful NPO. The manager Curtis Lowe is the person who took the initiative to start the project and is the person who performs most tasks, the local people often refer PCUs office as Curtis office.

PCU has a very decentralized hierarchy. It is a small organization, so everyone helps out with everything after their own ability and time. It is just a few people that are paid and have a strict position in the organization, the rest is made by locals, interns and volunteers. You can see that PCU is a decentralized organization due to the decision making process. Former volunteers expressed that even if Curtis is the manager, he was still doing the same things as the volunteers and spoken to on the same level and by that, leaves much influence to the workers.

Followed is an organization chart of PCU. The expats that where focused on in this thesis is the internship and volunteer side, that is managed by Timm Philips and Curtis Lowe. There is an extension of the organization chart made by PCU in appendix 3.



In appendix 2, an overview of PCUs finances is presented. Most of PCU income is from donations, 44% Events + auctions, 31% donation other + Xavier event Uluwatu Surf villas and the total income in a year is RP. 889.305.000. Most of the expenses PCU have goes to handle the Liquid waste management system, 65% of the expenses, and in total RP 834.228.000 is used every year.

#### 4.2.2 Human resources

PCU can be described through a Human resources perspective though PCU show that the communication and tasks are social- and innovation orientated, they communicate in all directions of the organization and are also group oriented. They use a lot of different communication channels when they are communicating with people, something that is described more in depth in chapter 4.2.3 and their communication style is both formal and informal, although this will lean further towards the informal side. These descriptions are all signs of an organization that is using a Human resources perspective though it means that they are working on an approach where they look at the interest of

all the individuals in the organization. This is all strongly showed during my observations at PCU.

#### **4.2.3 Communication channels**

To understand miscommunications, you have to look at the different communication channels that PCU are using, to identify where the problem occurs.

PCU uses a lot of different communication channels.

They are active on the internet and have a website, Facebook and Instagram account that are updated weekly with information on occurrences that have happened, going to happen or promotions to come to Uluwatu and help out. On their webpage there is also an informative video to show people what they do and to attract people to help out.

They also use e-mail to communicate and to get in contact with new volunteers and interns from all over the world. (projectcleanuluwatu.com. 2015)

In Uluwatu, the staff prefer to use Face to face communication and say that the best way to promote themselves are by “*Word of Mouth*”, which mean that the best way to promote PCU are when people talk about them to friends and family. By that, the word that PCU exist is spreading and that's how most people find PCU according to the manager Curtis. He explains that they have a good reputation abroad and if one person from a university comes to make an internship, many from the same school often start to come the year after, as they tell other people at their university that PCU is a good place to do an internship.

PCU has movie nights to get income and spread awareness, to promote their movie nights they use flyers and posters to put up in the Uluwatu area. They also have posters of all the work that they are doing that can be seen at the office which explains what they do, this is for people that just stop by or walk past the office.

Another important communication channel is by phone. The first thing Timm, a staff member of PCU, advised me to do, was to get a local phone number, because that is the best way to communicate in Uluwatu due to the bad internet reception in the area. This was also because they don't have strict opening hours, so communication by text messages are an important way to tell when the staff are away or in the office.

To communicate with new volunteers, they hand out a small information pack about what they do and why they are doing it. They also give them a tour around the area to

give them an idea about the organization and the projects they are currently undertaking.

Looking at the different communication channels that PCU are using and ranking them through how rich they are on information, you will see that they prefer to use channels that provide information, like direct talks or phone calls.

During the micro ethnographic study I observed that PCU use a very decentralized and informal communication method, to communicate with both each other within the organization and with the locals. Everyone can talk to everyone and even if Curtis is the manager, they use an informal way of communicating with him.

Most agreements that the expats are doing are oral agreements except with locals and construction workers, although they used to do oral agreements with them, they always change their mind or changed the deal after a while. Now they always finalize agreement with a written contract. Although sometimes even then deals are broken, but it's not as easily as with an oral agreement, Timm describes.

### 4.3 Culture on PCU

The culture that PCU has adopted is mainly the Balinese surf-culture that exists in Uluwatu, this is because that many of the workers and volunteers having connections to surfing and choose to be in the area because of the surfing. Many of the respondents tell me in their interviews that it's hard to make appointments with PCU and everything has a relaxed time perception, referred as *laid back-culture* from the email-interviews.

The office doesn't have strict opening hours, instead they are open when the staff don't surf or when there have a task to do. Most of the time, the office is open during the whole day for people to come in and say "Hi" or talk to the staff. The office has only 3 walls when its open, though one wall is the door and there is only one room, so when the staff are working, everyone can see what they are doing and come in and interrupt to talk or hangout, something that is encouraged and welcomed by the staff. That is also something that happened during my observations several times, that locals came in and wanted help. They would ask questions or surfers stopped by to talk. It is very important for PCU that they are a part of the community in Uluwatu and Curtis wish PCU to be



run only by locals in the future. PCU is well known in the community and the whole Uluwatu locals know who Curtis, the manager, is.

Many of the former volunteer respondents said that this culture was hard to understand and follow in the beginning, though they were used to their normal hectic routine where you always have a strict schedule everyday back in the countries where they normally live. This new unstrict-day routine was something that was appreciated by the former volunteers after being at PCU for a while and that they later liked, or got used to it, after understanding how it works and that the culture is similar in the whole of Bali. All the respondents also agree that even though it's a relaxed atmosphere at PCU, things get done in time.

Both Curtis and Timm, who work at PCU, hope that PCU can work as a blueprint for other beaches to follow in their steps. The neighbor beach, Padang-Padang has already been opened up for discussion to open a similar project there, though they have the same problem with sewage that goes straight into the ocean and nobody that collect garbages in the area. Both Timm and Curtis have a lot of opinions on how they would correct the process of progressing Padang-Padang in a more constructive manner than it was executed in Uluwatu. This will be by learning from what went wrong when they started PCU. First and foremost they express that they will use a down-top perspective, which means that they first will make research on what the locals request, who is in charge, who has the influence, who owns what and get the whole community on the project before they start.

The formalities in Uluwatu and on PCU is something that takes time. Curtis thought he could pioneer and get the project ongoing after two months, but instead it took two years to get to that point, he describes in the interview. The staff also describes, in the interviews, many optimistic volunteers coming to PCU who believe that they are going to help out and change a lot in a few hours or days, something that never happens. Fixation of Uluwatu will be a gradual process, a process that cannot be rushed. To really make a difference, volunteers have to invest a lot of time, weeks or months, to really understand how things are operated in Uluwatu and then make a difference.

## 4.4 Different groups

To understand miscommunication and misunderstandings, you also have to understand the different stakeholders, the individuals and groups that are living in Uluwatu and are in contact with PCU.

I have decided to describe and define three groups of people that share connections with each other in different ways. This includes culture, language, position in the organization or other ways and I have by that grouped; volunteers, staff and locals as three separate groups.

An important acknowledgement is that these groups are not static and these individuals can be grouped into a million different groups. Depending on certain situations, I have chosen to construct these groups to form a more effective understanding about miscommunication and these three groups have shown the most distinctive sense of belonging to each other from my observations and interviews. The description below is also a generalization of the whole group and does not, of course, apply to all individuals within that group.

Also it's hard to write about and describe these groups in these small summaries that I have made, though these are subjects that whole thesis can be written on. This section will explain what I observed and heard in the interviews in a brief summary.

### 4.4.1 Volunteers

Most volunteers that are on PCU are surfers that care about the different environmental issues, one former volunteer explains. The volunteers come from all over the world, but the former volunteers that I had the opportunity to interview were from France, Russia, Spain, Singapore and the Netherlands. But non from Indonesia, only expats.

Only two of the volunteers knew limited Indonesian and everybody knew English, more or less. PCU also offers the volunteers a dictionary to practice Bahasa Indonesian if they want, but the respondents explained that it's hard to learn more than the basic phrases, this is because the conversations with the locals started to look the same after a while. It was hard to work out how many volunteers that are working with PCU at the same time during the whole year. Sometimes it's just the ordinary staff, with no volunteers and sometimes it can be up to 20 volunteers at the same time. Many volunteers are also day-volunteers that just help out on specific events, like beach clean ups.

Many of the former volunteers that have been email-interviewed in this thesis were on PCU to also make their internship and because of that stayed a longer period of time with PCU.

One respondent describe the volunteers as following;

*“I always think that people who travel are different, especially who travel alone. And especially who volunteers. We all came by ourselves. And we all became good friends. We shared a lot, helped each other a lot, and learnt many things from each other. It was really easy to work with these people. I really enjoyed the time we had. I got only warm feelings when I think about them. Good heart people.”* - Kristina 2015

The respondents also expressed a way of connection to each other by talking the same level of English. None of the respondents had English as their first language as the staff member has, but still got good education in it in their home country, something that the locals don't get. By speaking the same level of English, the respondents expressed that it's easier to understand each other, though you don't use too complicated words or you may have trouble to communicate due to use of wrong words or trouble to make correct sentences.

The volunteers had to use much initiative and one respondent expressed that he didn't have the opportunity to work as if he was in a real company, but he understood this before as PCU is called a project. The volunteers help with organizing movie nights, beach clean ups, work in the gardens, work with finance, budgeting, taking care about all the bills, payments, donations, merchandising, printing marketing materials to mention a few tasks.

The respondents also answered that it was *“interesting”*, *“really fun”*, *“that you learn more”*, *“that its always rewarding”*, *“always loved it”*, *“and a bit of shocking”* when they described how it is to work with people from other countries or backgrounds than their own.

#### **4.4.2 Staff**

The staff that at the moment are working on PCU are the manager Curtis and Timm, who is a volunteer and intern coordinator. Both of them are from the United States, but

know Bahasa Indonesian to get by in the Uluwatu area. Both Curtis and Timm have only been in Uluwatu a few years and are sometimes still used to how things are in the United States even though they are starting to learn and get into some patterns of the local population in Uluwatu, like the locals time perspective.

Even though the staff are expats, they are well known in the whole Uluwatu area and *“Curtis’s strength was that he had cultivated good understanding and relationships with the local warung owners and other Balinese around Bukit. So when I tagged along with him for work, I saw that he could communicate effectively with the locals.”* one former volunteer describes.

As described before, the staff at PCU are open, relaxed and laid-back people, something that was observed during the micro-ethnographic study and was later confirmed in the interviews. One former volunteer describes how the communication worked between her and Curtis as follows;

*“In the beginning I found it really hard to get used to him, because he always went surfing whenever he wanted. Because of this it wasn’t really possible to make appointments with him. But after a week or two I started appreciate his kind of working and started doing my own things.”* - Marit 2015

It is hard to describe the staff at PCU without describing the whole organization and their culture, though PCU is such a small organization and the culture that Timm and Curtis belong to has set the culture of the whole organization. Like the influence and closeness to the surfing culture, which both the staff and the organization is involved in. The locals describe PCU and their staff as *“honest”* and *“trustworthy”* people, when asked and talked during the micro-ethnographic study.

Curtis is also hoping for a local, Hindu girl to become the manager in a near future, though he believed that she can operate in the community and handle the local politics in ways that he would never be able to do. That was his purpose from the start, to get the project in motion, help with the technical part like fundraising and installation of the tanks etc. which now is already up and running, then later handing it over to *“the Balinese side”* as he referred it to.

#### 4.4.3 Uluwatus locals

The people that live and have grown up in Uluwatu, with parents that are Balinese, are a group of people that I will refer to as locals. I will not refer to people that have lived there for several years but have a background in another country, though I got understanding through my interviews that the Uluwatu community is a close community. A local resident that was face to face interviewed, that have lived in uluwatu for 15 years but grew up in the United states, feels like he will never really penetrate the community, even if he in the future could speak perfect Bahasa Indonesian and live there his whole life. He believes this is because of his skin color, that is lighter than the locals and they will always see him as a *bule*, a word they are using for western people with light skin color.

One former volunteer from Singapore tried to describe how his relationship the locals was;

*“Another group were the Balinese at the Warungs at the Uluwatu cliff. They knew me through association to Curtis because I followed him around for work a lot. They are friendly. We spoke simple English to each other.[...] From associating with him [a local Balinese person] I got to know more about the other warung owners and their children. They were friendly but I could not connect deeper with them a lot because we only spoke simple English, and I did not spend much time with them. They were mostly out at sea surfing a lot, while my work priorities were assisting Curtis for PCU.”* - Ivan 2015

The Uluwatu community is extremely tight and people are closely working together. Many workers that sell bracelets, for example, share all the income at the end of the day one local described during my micro-ethnographic study. These close groups are hard for outside people to get into, even for other Indonesians, from example the neighbor island Java where many of the workers on Bali comes from.

One respondent explained that even if they give you a smile and act friendly, this is just a front. In the backstage many groups have rivals due to greed, that you need to have a bigger and better house, hostel or pool than your neighbor or cousin.

Another respondent describes the locals as very friendly and helpful people. One Former volunteer expressed that *“Balinese people are extreme friendly and kind”*.

The locals in Uluwatu, like the rest of the Balinese population, also have a different time perspective compared to the volunteers and staff at PCU has. Both staff and former volunteers describes lot of situations where they make an appointment with a local and they show up two hours later or maybe the next day.

They are also described in the interviews by the expats as people that even though they don't understand or can't do a certain thing that they are asked, they will say "yes" 10 times, just not to lose face, even if they mean maybe or no. Something that is perceived hard for the foreigners that have been interviewed, but this also leads to confusion within the local population.

The Balinese people are mostly of Hindu belief, this means that they spend a lot of time on rituals and ceremonies both on special long holidays but also small rituals every day. Some of the locals also have a strong belief in magic, and if someone does something bad towards another person it's not uncommon that locals put spells on each other. Talking to a lot of locals, they described that they use stones that mean different things, example if you have a ring with a black stone, you are protected against dishonest people. Another thing that is described by one respondent is that poison or death threats are common in the backstage area, something that you would never believe when you first meet them.

Respondents describes the local politics hard to understand for a foreigner, though every village has its own politics that all the locals know about but is hard to get official information about and make meetings with, as the community is a bit closed to outsiders.

## 4.5 Language

The language that is spoken by Balinese people on Bali is Bahasa Indonesian and Balinese language. But the language that was most frequently used at PCU was English and that is something that many of the locals also know the basics of. The staff working at PCU at the moment are from the US, so they speak perfect English and both of them also speak Bahasa Indonesian, which they both describe helps their everyday work a lot

and also to get more respect and not get tricked behind their back from the locals. It is also to show respect against locals and not force them to speak a foreign language. Only two of the former volunteers knew a little bit of Bahasa Indonesian, but it's normal that volunteers only get by with their English. One respondent told about several occasions that he encountered locals that do not know English, but solved this easy by getting Curtis or Timm and use them as an interpreter.

Most respondents mention language as an important fact to understand each other and that it's easier to reduce misunderstandings by speaking the same language and to connect with each other.

*“The first reason is our shared common language in English. I think language is the most important factor in determining how well people work together with each other. When we speak the same language, we understand each other, and tasks are completed with a lot less misunderstanding. “* - Ivan 2015

## 4.6 Miscommunications and misunderstandings

Almost all respondents described some sort of miscommunication and misunderstandings during their time in Uluwatu or at PCU, both in the day to day work and some bigger specific misunderstandings and miscommunications.

Most misunderstandings are described to be between the locals and the rest of the PCU member, including both staff and volunteers, even though volunteers comes from different countries with different backgrounds from all over the world. I have divided the miscommunication and misunderstandings in *Specific events and Everyday miscommunication and misunderstandings*

### 4.6.1 Specific events

Respondents mentioned the *fence control-story* as a specific event where misunderstandings occurred. This is about building a fence in Uluwatu as a persecution before the rain season comes and destroys PCUs gardens by erosion from the earth on the cliffs.

The problem there was that the locals complained a lot and did not want to co-operate with PCU. Two respondents have different beliefs on what was the real problem;

*“Locals were just complaining that we didn’t really listen to them and were giving good advices that the fence wouldn’t work, because they already tried many times. We built. It worked. Everyone was happy afterwards” - Karina 2015*

*“The problem was not if it would work or not, the problem was that we arrived in a place which is not ours, where people have been living for ages, and that we decide to do things against their will, without caring about what they say”. - Tristan 2015*

Another event that was described by the expats as a big communication failure was the *Waste water garden-story*, that both volunteers and staff talked about as an perfect example on how communication often fail in Uluwatu between the locals and PCU. PCU was supposed to build a wastewater garden to help the environment in Uluwatu and to treat the sewage water before it goes out in the nature again. The first problem that PCU encountered was that they were not 100 percent sure on who actually owned the land that they were supposed to build the wastewater garden, this due to miscommunication with the locals. The other problem that they described was that they started to build it with only verbal permission from the local they thought was the owner and then the owner change his mind after they already started building. This lead to the point that PCU had to drop the project at that place, losing a lot of money and time and find a new place to build.

The miscommunication according to the expats in this story is that the locals told PCU “OK, no problem, yes, sounds good”, which to PCU sounded like a permission to start to build. But in the Uluwatu community, a yes is not always a yes and the land owner had not fully understood how big the wastewater garden was supposed to be, which made him change his mind when he saw them starting to build it and how big it started to get. Misunderstandings continued in a similar way when they decided to make the wastewater garden at another place, even if they had written permission from the landowner.

Another big misunderstanding that occurred, and still occur is with the time plan that the manager Curtis had when he came to Bali, to start PCU. He had a plan to start the project in two months and then leave the project to the local people, and as he express *“relaxed and go surfing”* but it took him two years to manage to accomplish everything in his time plan, he explain. He believes that it is because he didn't have any prior



knowledge on how things worked in the area, like local politics, who owns what and who was the important stakeholders and that local people have a different time perspective than him.

#### **4.6.2 Everyday miscommunication and misunderstandings**

There were not only big events of miscommunications and misunderstandings, it was also small everyday events and encounters that went wrong.

There were not a lot of miscommunication or misunderstandings within the volunteering group, the respondents describes. They expressed that it was easy to talk and understand each other due to the same knowledge of English, so all communication was on the same level of simple English. The respondents expressed that it was only slight miscommunication that occurred within the group, something that they could joke about.

Something that many of the former volunteers expressed that was a little bit harder, was the communication with the staff on PCU for the volunteers that did not speak English fluent, though the staff have perfect English due to their mother tongue, and by that using more complicated, faster and harder level of English when explaining and talking. But that also helped them to practice their own English and improving it, one respondent describes.

Another former volunteer describes the communication with the staff at PCU it like this;

*“[...] that sometimes we couldn't understand Timm because we also didn't know some words and as for me most of the times I was guessing what exactly he wants from me. But, I never ever met such a patient person like Timm. I think everything was clear for him and could explain his tasks plenty of times. But in general, we never had a strong miscommunication with each other.”*                      *-Kristina 2015*

Both former volunteers and staff at PCU talked about patience as one of the most important parts of communication to avoid misunderstandings and to really understand each other in Uluwatu. If people have the patience to really listen and try to see what the other person is trying to explain or say, or try to communicate in other ways to get an

understanding, that helps a lot. Patience is also something that the former volunteers describes that the staff at PCU has a lot of.

Most of the everyday miscommunications and misunderstandings on everyday basis were with locals and people working for PCU. This, the respondents explain was due to cultural differences, especially that promises mean different things.

*“ [...] you have a promise one day and the next day they just break it. You can never be sure.”* - Timm 2015

Also miscommunication often arose due to the language gap between people, that locals don't talk good English and most of the volunteers don't speak Indonesian.

During the micro-ethnographic study, I found out by talking to both tourists and local people that individuals that had been abroad a lot or had foreign friends were not as likely to have misunderstandings with persons from different cultures.

One respondent who lived in Uluwatu for many years, talked about that some events that foreigners have with locals that they believe is misunderstandings, are not really misunderstandings, it's some of the locals who tries to trick or fool them. He explained that people in Uluwatu have for many generations never seen money and lived really poor. Since the internet boom on Bali, approximately around 2002-2004, people all over the world have started to hear about Uluwatu and because of this many more tourists visit which in turn generates more money, the respondents describes. In Uluwatu today, the respondent thinks that this makes the locals really greedy and then they fool people by pretending that is was a misunderstanding, to get more money from the foreigners.

One former volunteer described that she started to send text messages or used e-mail to reduce misunderstandings and that she felt that was a safer way of communicating in Uluwatu.

Another former volunteer thinks that is helped a lot that he been traveling and been in a multicultural environment before coming to PCU to reduce misunderstandings and be more patient. He describes it like this:

*“ [...] I've been living abroad for a long time and been in a multicultural environment for long and it help me to think”* - Javier 2015

*“My lesson learnt was that for minor mistakes like that [miscommunication], just acknowledge your shortcoming in that situation, learn from it, and move on to be a more mindful and aware communicator next time.” - Ivan 2015*

#### 4.7 Summary of empiricism

PCU is according to the respondents a relaxed and open organization, are decentralized and uses Human resources. They use a lot of different communication channels but the best way of communication is by the word of mouth. I have identified three different groups in Uluwatu that is of interest when you want to understand miscommunications and misunderstandings that share connections with each other in different ways; Volunteers, Staff and Locals. Two of theas groups are expats and are interviewed about misunderstandings and miscommunications. The languages that was used at PCU was English, both simple and advanced but Bahasa Indonesian was also used by locals and staff.

Miscommunications and misunderstandings occurred between the expats and locals, both language wise and because of different views of promises and time.

## 5 Analysis and discussion

I will in this chapter present my own knowledge together with the empirical data and theories presented in the previous chapters to try to get an understanding on intercultural miscommunications on small multicultural NPOs and apply the different theoretical perspective on those. I will also in this chapter present different possible reasons why misunderstandings and miscommunications occurred starting on a global level, later go into a group oriented explanation and at the end on an individual level.

### 5.1 Uluwatu and globalization

Globalization is something that has had a big impact on Uluwatu the last 10 years according to both locals and respondents. This had led to the fact that Uluwatu is growing rapidly due to the accessibility of internet also is increasing. Globalization is something that has happened really fast in the whole of Bali and you notice that Uluwatu is no exception, rather a front figure in that field.

People that didn't have money before, now gain a lot through the tourist coming to the area. But just because Uluwatu is a village that is expanding to the global area, doesn't mean that the culture is changing in the same rapid pace. As Samovar (2009) writes, Culture is not stagnation, it is in constant movement due to its environment, but its changing slowly and the micro-ethnographic study show that Uluwatu it can't keep up the pace with globalization. People and tourists come to Uluwatu and think that things are handled in the same way, or similar ways, as in their home countries though, from the outside, it looks like they can. This is not the case, culture is deep and affects Uluwatu in profound ways and to get things done, you need to understand those ways. Otherwise this leads to misunderstandings and miscommunication.

As Miller (2012) argues in her book, globalization has both advantages and challenges and this is something that you clearly can see at PCU. It has led to development in the sense that more money are flowing and coming to Uluwatu and that the area is getting sewage and garbage pickup from PUC, something that would not happen if globalization didn't exist. But in the same time, globalization has led to the fact that Uluwatu is getting more garbage and by that affecting the environment in a bad way.

Cultural diversity is something that can be argued both for and against in Uluwatu as well. More different cultures are coming and live together which make Uluwatu a place full with different perspective of life and languages, but in the same time, the English language are strongly promoted and the locals are learning a bit of English while only some of the expats learn a few words or nothing in Bahasa Indonesia.

In summary you can say that the borders are starting to open up to foreigners in Uluwatu too fast though the culture is still consistent and can't keep up, this is one plausible reason to explain the misunderstandings and miscommunication that occurred at PCU between the locals and expats .

## 5.2 Cultures as a part of misunderstandings

Looking at the three groups, locals, staff and volunteers at PCU, most misunderstandings occurred, between locals and people working for PCU, even though the volunteers came from different countries themselves and had different backgrounds. Not many misunderstandings occurred between the expats, within the volunteer group or with the staff at PCU.

Then looking at the misunderstandings that occurred when the locals said yes to certain question but hadn't really understood the question or actually meant no or maybe could be an effect of a culture differences.

One explanation could be that locals at Uluwatu belongs to a high context culture, where a lot of the communication occurs in what context things are said and how they are said according to Hall (1990). Because the expats at PCU have backgrounds in countries that are normally referred as low context cultures, this can create misunderstandings between these groups.

Many of the misunderstandings that took place in everyday life was described as a result of locals saying yes to everything, and people at PCU, as a part of a low context culture believed they literally meant yes, but as the locals are a part of a high context culture, where a yes could mean maybe or no, leads to confusion between the two parts. Persons that comes to Uluwatu and are a part of a low context culture, will struggle with this as they are used to another way of communicating, a more straight way were you take the words in a conversation or in an agreement in a more literary way. People in

Uluwatu tend to read more through the context of an event and to agree or say yes has not the same impact on a promise.

Looking at how the expats describes the wastewater garden-story and applying Halls high and low context culture theory, you can find plausible explanation for the event and the miscommunication that occurred.

Time was also part of the problem for the expats, they described that many misunderstandings occurred due to changed plans from the locals or that they did not show up on time. This is something that also can be understood by applying Halls high and low context culture theory, by looking at the two groups referred as Monochronic people and Polychronic people. Seeing that locals in Uluwatu belongs to a high context culture and by that also belonging to a Polychronic culture, they are people that instead tend to do many things at the time, are more inclined to change plans while Monochronic people, like the expats on PCU are by belonging to the low context culture, tend to only do one thing at the time and are more committed at deadlines.

Language was a big part of the misunderstandings and miscommunications that occurred, by thinking in terms of the Sapir- Whorf hypothesis, which mean that a person's every thought cannot fully be understood by another person that are using a different language, because the mindset is strongly influenced by one's mother tongue. This could also be a part of the reason that the expats had trouble to fully understand the locals and mistakes arise. Language helps us think and to steer our thoughts and yes and no could have different meanings or different values within the locals and expats cultures, which lead to the confusion when building the wastewater garden.

Important to notice in this analyses, is that all people that are referred as locals or expats doesn't necessary have to belong to a high or low context culture, they are all individuals, but due their share of common behavior, I decided to use this theory as one plausible explanation for the miscommunications and misunderstandings that occurred on PCU. Another note is that I don't emphasize on either a high or a low context culture to be the best. I will in next chapter instead go in to the individual level as a reason of the misunderstandings.

### 5.3 Making sense of miscommunication

If we now go deeper on to an individual level as an explanation of why misunderstandings and miscommunication occurred between the expats and locals, we can look at Karl Wieck's Sensemaking perspective and use some of his properties to make an analysis.

First we have the *Social processes* and the *Retrospective*, and if we apply this, that all the individuals, both expats and locals in Uluwatu went back from past experiences of interaction with people when they were trying to make sense of a misunderstanding, we can find a plausible explanation for the events. First, locals go back in their memory of how they normally communicate with each other and the expats do the same, but gather knowledge from past events from their home countries.

Here you can see that people on PCU, that have been a longer period of time in Uluwatu understand, through past experience with communication with local people, how locals communicate and by that reduce misunderstandings while the new volunteers had more difficulties in the beginning. This was also done by looking at it in a retrospective way by comparing similar events from the past. These events could be with both locals at PCU or if you are a frequent traveler, like one respondent explained, that you have a different knowledge since before that all people on the planet don't communicate in the same way.

This also goes in both ways, local people that had lived abroad or had a lot of foreign friends understood that people on PCU make sense out of events in a different way and reduced misunderstandings in that way.

The third properties is *Reliance on clues*, which mean that the misunderstandings that happened can be understood through how different people extract and focus on different clues and parts. This means that locals that been living in Uluwatu their whole life extract and focus on some particular elements when they are communicating and completely ignore other clues of a conversation, based on past events, rules, norms, regulations and of course the locals individual values and beliefs to make sense while people at PCU don't extract the same, which leads to misunderstandings. The locals in Uluwatu and the people working for PCU have different goals with the conversations, due to different missions. PCU has their goal to sustain and clean up the environment in the area, and don't focus on profit though most of the workers are volunteers and don't

gain any money from it, hence a plausible reason could be that they are focusing on clues in the conversations on what is best for the environment and for PCU. Local construction workers and landowners tend to have the focus on profit and how much money things will cost or gain, hence their focus is on different parts of the conversation than workers at PCU and that can lead to misunderstandings due to different extractions of clues. This could be a plausible explanation when looking at the wastewater garden- story, where the expats describe these problematic situations as a great example of miscommunications and misunderstandings that occur in Uluwatu.

A fourth property on how people make sense is by *Plausibility*. The expats create a plausible explanation to explain miscommunications with the locals, this is something that has been a big part of the interviews, to ask the respondents why they think misunderstandings occurred. This is not to see truth on what was really happening, it was rather to see how the respondents created plausible explanations for the misunderstandings. The respondents have all expressed different plausible explanations but they all come back to that the cultures are different to each other.

Sensemaking is also made from *Identity*, and this is something that you have to think about when you are making studies in Intercultural communication, that people also make sense out of events by who we define who we are. How we see the world and ourselves is a big part of sensemaking. Both the expats and local people define themselves both conscious and unconscious through their culture and that could be one of the reasons why miscommunications occurred.

If you look at the last properties, that is that sensemaking is *Ongoing*. You will see that this also fits in perfectly when trying to explain the misunderstandings that happened. People change all the time and grow by gaining more perspectives.

If you look at the events of the Waste-water garden, you see that this is a perfect example that sensemaking is ongoing. First PCU had a lot of misunderstanding with the locals, but after gaining more understanding about how locals make businesses, they started to reduce misunderstandings when they moved the waste-water garden to another place because they started to make sense out of the event in a different way.



You can say that the miscommunication occurred due to different ways of how individuals make sense out of event, due to former knowledge on life, what purpose they had with the conversation and from their own background on cultural habits.

## 6 Conclusion and summary

This thesis has been trying to discover an answer on “*How is miscommunication described and perceived in a multicultural, small, nonprofit organization, through the perspective of the expats, working on the organization?*”

This is something that has been presented in Chapter 4.6 and later expanded and see if the miscommunication and misunderstandings can be understood through different existing theories, like high and low context cultures, globalization and the sensemaking perspective, and use Karl Weicks definition. I will in this chapter try to summaries and answer that question.

The expats that where interviewed in this thesis describes the miscommunications and misunderstandings to be between them and the locals living in Uluwatu. The expats describes the miscommunications to be due to different languages, where the local populations mother thong are Bahasa Indonesia and only speak a little English, which most of the expats talk fluently. Promises and time perception was something that the expats also perceived as something that was the major problem for them when it comes to miscommunications and misunderstandings. The expats found it difficult when the locals did not show up on time or break promises and this made them confused.

To first understand the miscommunications and misunderstandings in Uluwatu, you need to understand the rapid expansion and globalization in the area and that culture don't change in the same pace which leads to confusion with people that comes to the area from other countries.

Miscommunication mainly occurred between locals and people working for PCU, two groups that belong to a high respective low context culture.

These miscommunications and misunderstandings were described by the respondents as a result of different perceptions of time and promises as one reason, something that can be called Monochronic people and Polychronic people, where the different groups precise time in different ways, locals that is Polychonical orientated by doing many

things at the same time and don't consider deadline as important as the Monochronic oriented expats do.

Members of PCU had trouble reading what local people really meant when they said "yes" or agreed. Misperception were also described due to different ways of operate in the area and due to differences in language knowledge. These misunderstandings have been handled in different ways, both on a short term basis by getting help in form of an interpreter, in this case other persons working on PCU that knows Bahasa Indonesian, if there is language gaps between volunteers and locals and on long term by always make written contracts instead of oral.

Plausible explanations on these misunderstandings and miscommunications, that are raised in this thesis, is that people make sense of events in different ways, especially if the individuals within a misunderstanding belong to both a high context culture and a low context culture.

This thesis has been explaining these misunderstandings and miscommunications through Karl Wieck's sensemaking perspective by applying 7 properties that describe how individuals make sense out of miscommunication by perceiving the event in different ways due to former knowledge.

These 7 properties show that past and former knowledge that the volunteers and staff at PCU had on how things work in their home countries, played a great part of how they perceived the locals and made sense out of the interactions and by that misunderstandings occurred, though that past knowledge is not valid in that new context with the locals. Facts like locals and PCU has different goals with the conversation and by that are focusing and extracting different clues from the conversations, is also a reason that misunderstandings occurred. Although we also make sense through past experiences and our culture is a part of that. Identity and individual past experience is also a big part of the reason and not only collective in form of culture.

We can, by applying the sensemaking perspective see that culture is not everything and the whole reason when it comes to miscommunication and misunderstandings in a Multicultural NPO, because everyone in that took part of the misunderstandings are individuals and culture can only play part of a person.

My aim is that this thesis will be used in the field of intercultural miscommunication and see that you can apply a sensemaking perspective to get an understanding that it's not only culture that matters when it comes to intercultural communication, it is also due to the individual, how people make sense out of events.

Many of the misunderstandings on PCU is due to knowledge gap on how locals operate in the area from the expats side. According to the interviews with staff on PCU, people comes from other countries, are optimistic to work and thinks that they can work in the same way as they do in their home countries and manage a lot in a day, which is not the case. When the manager Curtis came, he had a plan to start the project in two months and then leave the project to local people, but it took him two years to manage to accomplish everything where they are today. He believes that it is because he didn't have any prior knowledge on how things worked in the area, like local politics, who owns what and who was the important stakeholders.

One large reason that is plausible of these misunderstandings and miscommunications that occurred on PCU was the unconscious strategy to start the project in a top down perspective.

My perception is also that if a similar project is being founded on a different beach with locals getting involved and get more influence in the organization from the beginning, misunderstandings and miscommunication would be reduced a lot, especially if you get key persons and important stakeholders that have a high position and a lot of influence in the local community on board on the project. Due to the fact that the respondents thought that they will never really become a part of the community, even if they tried their whole life, due to their background in another country and that they are not Hindus, to get more locals involved high in the decision making proses would be an advantage when dealing with misunderstandings and miscommunications.

By using a down-top perspective where you get the Balinese culture into the structure of the organization and give the locals more influence, by asking them for help, instead of having the mind set on coming there to help them, in a way that the locals are not used to operate in, misunderstandings could be reduced. It is important to notice that PCU already are trying with this and that they already working closely to the locals and are aware that they started with the wrong mindset by mistake.

This thesis can be expanded by, in a more comprehensive way, look at the view from the local's perspective, something that I did not had the chance to go in depth into in this thesis. This would help to get a deeper and comprehensive understanding on the miscommunication and misunderstandings that occurred, by receiving everybody's opinion.

I want to finish my thesis with a quote from one of the former volunteers, talking about how it is to work with people from different countries;

*“You definitely feel like you learn more, as it can put some pressure on your nerves and make you emotional: if it makes you emotional, then you have something to learn, because it means that it touches you. The aim is not to prevent you from feeling anything, but to accept everything as it comes: there is no need to react violently, or whatsoever, just accept it.”*

*- Tristan 2015*

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# Appendices

Appendix 1 Question Guide

Appendix 2 Finances

Appendix 3 Organization chart by PCU

## **Appendix 1. Question Guide**

### volunteers

- When were you at PCU and how long did you stay there?
- Where are you from and what languages do you speak?
- What is your age?
  
- Could you describe the time you had at PCU, what did you do there? What people did you meet? Where there a lot of other volunteers when you were there and where were they from?
  
- Can you remember a time (or several times) when miscommunication and/or misunderstandings occurred? With which person was that? Local/other volunteer/with PCU? what happened and how was it solved? It can be both big and small misunderstandings.
  
- How would you describe working with people that comes from another country then your own? Was it difficult or do you feel like you learned more?

### Staff

- How long have you been here, how did you got here and what do you do here?
- What languages do you speak?
- How is the best way to communicate here in uluwatu? both with the local and with the volunteers?
- How does volunteers normally found out about PCU and How many volunteers do you normally have in a year?
- Now if we think about miscommunication and misunderstandings, is that something that usually happen?
- Why do you think those miscommunications happened?
- is there any miscommunication on daily bases that normally happen?
- Is there often miscommunication that happen between you and the volunteers?
- what would you say is the most difficult vs the most positive thing about working with people from other cultural, backgrounds and countries?



## **Appendix 2. PCU finances**

Here a short finances and economy overview is presented, to get an understanding how big PCU is and their impact scale on Uluwatu. This is also to see how much PCU rely on events and big donations to survive. Everything is in the local currency, Indonesian Rupiah.

### PCU income and donations

44% Events + auctions  
31% donation other + xavier event Uluwatu Surf villas  
10% monthly supporter  
7% movie night donation  
5% merchandising sales  
2 % other operational income  
1% donation boxes  
total rp. 889.305.000

### PCU expenses and cost

2013-14  
65% Liquid waste management system  
18% administration and operations  
7% merchandising  
6% solid waste management system  
3% other operational expenses  
1% beautification  
total RP 834.228.000

### Appendix 3. Organization chart by PCU

