

FUNDAÇÃO GETÚLIO VARGAS

Escola Brasileira de Administração Pública e de Empresas

MARIANA DA FONSECA BRANDÃO

WORKING AN IDENTITY, BUYING A LIFE:

The remains of Disney way of life among ICP alumni

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Dissertação para obtenção do grau de mestre apresentada à Escola
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Orientador: Eduardo André Teixeira Ayrosa

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WAY OF LIFE AMONG ICP ALUMNI**

Dissertação apresentada ao Curso de Mestrado em Administração da Escola Brasileira de Administração Pública e de Empresas para obtenção do grau de Mestre em Administração.

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"Somehow I can't believe there are many heights that can't be scaled by a man who knows the secret of making dreams come true. This special secret, it seems to me, can be summarized in four c's. They are curiosity, confidence, courage, and constancy, and the greatest of these is confidence. When you believe a thing, believe it all over, implicitly and unquestioningly."

Walt Disney

“In order to make good in your chosen task, it’s important to have someone you want to do it for. The greatest moments in life are not concerned with selfish achievements, but rather with the things we do for the people we love and esteem, and whose respect we need.” (Walt Disney)

I dedicate this work to my parents, Marcelo and Carla, who have always supported and encouraged me to follow my dreams.

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Then, I wanted to thank my classmates, particularly those who have become part of my dearest friends. I am glad to have shared with them this journey to become a master, which ended up being a tough but still pleasant one.

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Abstract

The Disney International College Program (ICP) is an internship program sponsored by The Walt Disney Company, in which foreign university and college students travel to the United States, to spend their summer vacation working on the Walt Disney World Resort on Florida.

The ICP has become very popular among Brazilian university students. Every year, almost thirty thousands of them apply for this program, though only about eight hundred manage to become a cast member. While on the program these youngsters develop a Disney Identity that is joined to their self.

This research's goal is to explore the ICP role on the participants' life, showing its effects on these youngsters self-construction. In addition, we have aimed to investigate how ICP Alumni (people who took part of the ICP) manage to sustain their Disney identity, even after leaving the program.

In order to meet our goal we have developed a qualitative case study, in which the case studied was the ICP alumni identity. Moreover, through our literature review we have acknowledged that someone's self lays in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going on. Hence, our data was collected and analyzed through a narrative inquire method.

Athwart our study, we have found out that the Walt Disney Company does an efficient job in convincing these youngsters that their mission and values are very important and thus, the ICP alumni become to praise the Disney Company and brand. We have also observed the existence of an actual Disney alumni community bonded by principles, ideas and consumption.

Resumo

O *Disney International College Program* (ICP) é um programa de estágio patrocinado pela Walt Disney Company, destinado a estudantes universitários estrangeiros. Uma vez aceitos no programa, estes jovens viajam para os Estados Unidos durante as férias de verão para trabalhar por três meses no Walt Disney World Resort na Flórida.

O ICP tornou-se um programa popular dentre os estudantes universitários brasileiros. Todos os anos, aproximadamente trinta mil jovens candidatam-se para o programa. Contudo, apenas cerca de oitocentos conseguem ser aprovados. Durante o programa esses jovens desenvolvem uma “identidade Disney” que passará a fazer parte do *self* deles.

O objetivo deste trabalho é explorar o papel ICP na vida dos seus participantes, assim como desvendar seus efeitos na construção do *self* destes jovens. O presente estudo também procurou avaliar como os participantes conseguem sustentar sua “identidade Disney”, mesmo após deixarem o programa.

Para tanto, foi desenvolvido um estudo de caso qualitativo, no qual o caso analisado foi a identidade de participantes do ICP. Após uma breve análise da literatura sobre identidade, consideramos o *self* como a capacidade do indivíduo em manter viva uma narrativa particular. Assim, nossos dados foram coletados e analisados por meio do método de análise narrativo.

Através deste estudo, descobrimos que a Walt Disney Company realiza um trabalho eficiente em convencer os participantes do ICP que a sua missão e seus valores são muito importantes. Com isso, estes jovens passam a louvar a marca Disney. Também foi observada a existência de uma comunidade de *Disney Alumni* (pessoas que participaram do ICP) unida por princípios, ideias e consumo.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Every year, thousands of Brazilian students apply for an internship position at the Disney International College Program (ICP). Ten years ago I was one of these applicants, looking forward to spend my summer vacation working at Walt Disney World Resort. After a harsh selection process, I got in, and in December of 2003 I've embarked on a journey that would change my life.

At Walt Disney World (WDW), after passing through all basic training stages, a Cast member (employee) “earns his ears” (Mickey Mouse ears). Like a tattoo or a rebirth mark, the imaginary ears that I've earned in 2003 became part of me, of who I am. After ten years, once in a while some ICP moments still pop up on my mind and make me smile. Lessons and values that I've learned at the program are still useful on my daily life. But does it happen only to me? What others ICP Alumni (people who took part of the ICP) have to say about their experience? Looking at the official fan page for the Disney College Program on Facebook one will find the following description:

Tens of thousands of people who now live all around the world have something very special in common. They are Disney College Program Alumni, and they are part of a unique group of people who now span an entire generation.

In some way, the ICP experience stirs its participant's lives. Getting in touch with alumni from all over Brazil, it became clear that this experience wasn't life changing only for me. Although some were more incisive than others, all of them reported to have learned lessons for life at Disney, and more important, they all have shown an emotional bond with the Disney Company. But how can this emotional bond remain sustainable years after people leave the program? How can some months of work experience become so prized in someone's life?

While researching about this phenomena, it was acknowledged that this sort of experience, in which people from one country travel into another to work for short periods, mostly during summer school-vacations, is also known as “working holiday” (Cohen, 1973). Researches on this field have observed that people commonly engage on this kind of experience in their early to mid-twenties, in order to rediscover or refresh themselves (Bell, 2002; Wilson, Fisher, & Moore, 2010). Usually, they envision a traditional life in their future that will tie them to

family and work, and they want to try something adventurous while they are still young (P. A. Adler & Adler, 2012). Moreover, some of these researches (eg. Bell, 2002; Inkson & Myers, 2003) have framed this sort of journey as an “rite of passage” to adulthood , embracing interesting similarities to Victor Turner's (1973) concept of pilgrimage.

The working holiday phenomena and its consequences on the participant's life have been largely studied on the Oceania context, where for long it has become popular among youngsters to travel to their ancestors land (England) for living and working temporally (eg. Bell, 2002; Inkson & Myers, 2003; Wilson et al., 2010). However, the academic literature is still quite incipient on these phenomena when it comes to people from the rest of the world. In addition, after an avid research it wasn't found a single study concerning this experience in a specific organization.

Still, the relevance of the present study goes beyond filling this working holiday theoretical gap. The question of identity troubles many youngsters on the contemporary societal context (Giddens, 1991). Likewise, consumption and brands have become valuable resources to work out this identification discomfort (Gabriel & Lang, 2006). Thus, by analyzing the ICP experience we will show how the Disney brand is incorporated to the ICP alumni self.

This research's object of study will be the remains of Disney way of life among ICP alumni. Furthermore, its goal will be to explore the ICP “pilgrimage” role on its participant's life as well as its effects on these youngsters self-construction. In this way, we intent to elucidate, how the ICP alumni sustain these traces of a “Disney identity”, even after leaving the program.

In order to achieve its goal, the present research was developed as follows: First, it will be presented a brief theoretical background in which relevant concepts of identity are going to be explored. Thereafter, it will be explained how the study was carried out followed by its findings. At last these findings will be discussed and directions for future researches on this topic will be indicated.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 IDENTITY

To define one's identity we would ask ourselves the question: who one is? "An identity is the set of meanings that define who one is when one is an occupant of a particular role in society, a member of a particular group, or claims particular characteristics that identify him or her as a unique person" (Burke & Stets, 2009, p.3).

Thus, identifying ourselves, or others, is a matter of meaning. As meaning always involves interaction (eg. agreement and disagreement, convention and innovation, communication and negotiation) it only makes sense to talk about identity in a social context (Jenkins, 2008). As reminded by Gabriel and Lang (2006), identity was first addressed as a political issue. For instance, claims to power and property depended crucially on establishing the identities of individuals making the claims. Additionally, the maintenance of criminal records and administration of legal justice and discipline hinges depended on establishing the identity of people as unique individual. These authors refer to this concept of identity as 'forensic identity', to emphasize its political nature.

We must acknowledge that the 'forensic identity' wasn't a concern for the individuals identified, but for those who sought to control them (Gabriel & Lang, 2006). In some situations, individuals could be unwilling to cooperate on their identification. Thus, actions as branding of offenders, such as marking their "criminal record" on their bodies, were taken. In the 1870s, a technical solution for the political problem of identity was introduced. Sir William Herschel presented in Bengal the Fingerprinting technique, which is a far more discreet but also more efficient solution than branding had been to the slave-owners (Gabriel & Lang, 2006).

As for the individual's self-concern about identity, it was brought to light by the term 'identity crisis', conceived by Erik Erikson in the 1950s (Gabriel & Lang, 2006). One's awareness of his identity is experienced as a sense of psychosocial well-being. It is easily perceived as "feeling of being at home in one's body, a sense of 'knowing where one is going', and an inner assuredness of anticipated recognition from those who count" (Erikson, 1959).

Nevertheless, such a sense of identity is never gained nor maintained once and for all, as explained by Erikson (1959) it is constantly lost (identity crisis) and regained.

Accordingly, some theorists (eg. Giddens, 1991; Hall, 1996; Sokefeld, 1999) have explained that an identity is neither fixed nor permanent. In fact, people are endowed with a multiplicity of identities as “they occupy multiple roles, are members of multiple groups, and claim multiple personal characteristics and the meanings of these identities are shared by members of society” (Burke & Stets, 2009, p.3). In order to simultaneously and/or subsequently embrace and enact multiple identities, “we need something that somehow remains the “same” - in spite of the various differences entailed by different identities” (Sokefeld, 1999, p.424). In this way, what remains the “same” is people’s reflexive sense of basic distinction of the self from everything else. This reflexive sense can also be felt as consistency and continuity, as the basic difference persists.

Sokefeld (1999) argues that, to comprehend people’s plurality of identities, it is indispensable to make a distinction between identity and self. For instance, as an illustration of this view, professional soccer players are athletes that are usually keen on both playing and watching soccer games since they were kids. During their childhood, they commonly choose a specific soccer team to support, and thereby are identified as some soccer team fan. Nevertheless, after becoming a professional player they can also be identified as an athlete. On a job market different companies, or in this case different clubs, offer different salaries, conditions, benefits, and as we know, a soccer player can be a fan of a certain team and end up playing for another. Now imagine an athlete that is some soccer club fan and plays for the rival team. Is he supposed to be happy when his favorite team loses? Is he supposed to celebrate when he scores against the team he has always supported? Thus, as exemplified, managing our multiple identities might not be as simple as changing clothes, and is up to the self to handle this task (Sokefeld, 1999).

Therefore, the self “characterizes an individual’s consciousness of his or her own being”(Burke & Stets, 2009). Aligned with this idea Giddens (1991) defines the self as a reflexive project, for which the individual is responsible. This reflexive project entails at least some agency, some ability to act on one’s own account. As explained by Sokefeld (1999) the agency may not be displayed, but it concerns the individuals choice to exert it negatively.

On the other hand, it would be extremely naïve to believe that the self is a loose reflexive project. In fact, the self is built upon continuous dialogue with communities - cultural and social worlds (Ciampa, 2005; Giddens, 1991). We must acknowledge that almost every human being live in groups (communities) and act as a group member. Furthermore, even when an individual chooses to live in physical isolation, he/she may still feel psychologically linked to a group. According to Turner (1984) “group affiliations are a universal feature of human social life”. Given that, the individual can only construct the self in the context of relations with others (Adams & Marshall, 1996). As stated by Hall (1996), at the same time we project "ourselves" into cultural identities, we internalize their meanings and values, making them "part of us".

According to Zygmunt Bauman (2004) these communities (to which identities refer as to entities that define them) are of two kinds: those of life and fate (eg. color of skin, family, nationality) and communities that are bonded primarily by ideas and principles. Moreover, the question of identity arises only when individuals are faced with communities of the second kind, inasmuch as people have several options of different ideas and principles. While choosing, one is required to compare options, to revise choices already made on another occasion, to try to reconcile contradictory and often incompatible demands.

The question of identity have become even more salient on the current societal context, sometimes referred to as late modernity or postmodernity, where choice has taken a leading role on people's life courses (Giddens, 1991). In most western societies, community-oriented policies were replaced by market-oriented ones. Furthermore, lifestyles that once were production-based are now consumption-based. As a result, “life-course events that used to be more normatively structured (e.g., marriage, gender roles, religious beliefs) are increasingly left to individuals to decide on their own” (Schwartz, Côté, & Arnett, 2005, p.203).

Given that, doubt has penetrated in most aspects of our daily life, at least as a background phenomenon, increasing individual's insecurity and anxieties (Giddens, 1991). Let's take for instance someone's adherence to a religion, particularly one that provides a comprehensive lifestyle. This can lessen the individual anxieties but it is very unlikely to provide an entire escape from doubt. Today, no one can fail to be aware that living according to the precepts of a given faith is one among other choices. As a matter of fact, the very moral outrage that

religious people may feel about skeptic ones can be better explained by an underlying anxiety, rather than a feeling of self-assured adhesion to the “cause”.

Thus, contemporary life can be inherently unsettling, and these sensations of anxiety come to be particularly pronounced during fateful moments, when individuals are called on to take decisions that are particularly consequential for their ambitions, or more generally for their future lives (Giddens, 1991). Life transitional phases are usually featured by these fateful moments, and its consequent anxiety is often translated into identity crises.

2.2 IDENTITY CRISES AND YOUNG ADULTS

For quite some time Eriksonian and, Neo-Eriksonian theorists have been studying identity crises particularly on young adults (eg. Adams & Marshall, 1996; Marcia, 1980; Schwartz, Kurtines, & Montgomery, 2005). These scholars consider “late adolescence” a time of self-uncertainty and identity crises, followed by a growing need of occupational and ideological commitment. As explained by Marcia (1966), when faced by such imminent adult tasks as getting a job and becoming a citizen, the youngster is required to synthesize childhood identifications in such a way that he can both establish a reciprocal relationship with his society and maintain a feeling of continuity within himself.

Through the last decades, it has been observed that this transition to adulthood has become increasingly prolonged, mainly due to postmodern way of life (Côté, 2002). As previously mentioned, in contemporary society, problems and issues that were once addressed with collective solutions are increasingly left to individuals to resolve on their own. People are now responsible for living with the consequences of one's own actions and decisions, either for good or bad (Côté, 2002). Consequently, young people stay in school longer, marry later, and have their first child later than they did in the past. Given that, postindustrial transition to adulthood can last from the late teens until at least the mid-20s (Schwartz, 2005), which is the age range of our research population.

During this prolonged adulthood, Côté (1996) suggested that young adults will differ in terms of how enthusiastically and actively they will face their identity crises, which can range from degrees of “default individualization” to degrees of “developmental individualization”. Hence, while some prefer to simply go along for the ride and passively solve it with the mass-

marketed and mass-educational prepackaged identities, others engage on more difficult developmental tasks, like actively exploring, challenging, and developing one's beliefs and potentials

The dissemination of these mass identity packages is extremely reinforced by the media. "Localities are thoroughly penetrated by distanciated influences, whether this be regarded as a cause for concern or simply accepted as a routine part of social life." (Giddens, 1991, p.188) Many elements of these mediated experiences are incorporated into individuals' day-to-day conduct. Though, it is never a random or passive process, nor it happens as a collage. In fact, each individual imposes one's own order of importance on the diversity of transmitted information, selecting actively its contents (Giddens, 1991).

To some extent, the appropriation of the information transmitted by the media and the assimilation of these identity packages follow pre-established habits and avoid cognitive dissonance (identity crises). That is, "the plethora of information available is reduced via routinized attitudes which exclude, or reinterpret, potentially disturbing knowledge" (Giddens, 1991, p.188). On the other hand, such closure can be regarded as prejudice; once the individual refuses to seriously consider those positions and divergent ideas that s/he already has.

Consequently, some individuals may fear the commodity identities, once they threaten to remove choice and replace it with standardization (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). Nowadays, people are offered an ever growing plurality of consumer choices. As such, those youngsters who adopt higher degrees of "developmental individualization", will take advantages of it and compensate for the institutional holes and deficits of late modernity by creatively making self-investments while growing as an adult (Côté, 2002). These self-investments are also known as identity capitals (Schwartz, Côté, et al., 2005). In order to clarify the idea of identity capital, we will use Côté (1996) example which compare it to the stock market:

Most generally, the term "identity capital" denotes what individuals "invest" in "who they are". These investments potentially reap future dividends in the "identity markets" of late modern communities. To be a player in these markets, one must first establish a stable sense of self which is bolstered by the following: social and technical skills in a variety of areas; effective behavioural repertoires; psychosocial development to more advanced levels; and associations in key social and occupational networks. At the very least, given the apparent chaos of late-modern society, key resources for bargaining and exchanging with others in the late-modern communities are apt to involve skills in negotiating life-passages with

others, such as securing validation in communities of strangers, and attaining membership in the circles and groups to which one aspires. The most successful investors in the identity markets presumably have portfolios comprising two types of assets, one more sociological and the other more psychological. (Côté, 1996, p.426)

Hence, this identity capital model comprises people utilization of resources by means of various (conscious and unconscious) strategies and, over time, the gains made through these efforts can become resources for further exchange (Côté, 2002). We believe that a working holiday experience, explained on the next section, can provide a beneficial context for the acquisition of identity capitals. This experience provides a “moratorium” in the transition to adulthood, which is a propitious time to accrue certain psychosocial resources.

2.3 THE WORKING HOLIDAY “PILGRIMAGE”

According to Cohen, (1973) “working holiday” is the sort of experience, in which people from one country travel into another to work for short periods, mostly during summer school-vacations. Researches concerning this experience (eg. Bell, 2002; Wilson, Fisher, & Moore, 2010) have observed that people commonly engage on this kind of experience in their early to mid-twenties, in order to rediscover or refresh themselves. Usually, this youngsters envision a traditional life in their future that will tie them to family and work, and they want to try something adventurous while they are still young (P. A. Adler & Adler, 2012).

The antecedents for the working holiday phenomenon lie in Europe (Wilson et al., 2010), with the grand tour tradition. During the 17th and 18th century, affluent, well-educated youth used to set out on adventure trips “to experience the hidden, strange, and exotic of faraway countries and unknown people” (Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995, p.820). This was much alike an educational finishing school experience with the purpose of increasing one’s sophistication, worldliness and social awareness (Adler, 1985). The same motivations that used to lead the wealthy late Victorian period youth to embark on this journey, later on encouraged the tramping traditions, the backpacker tourism and the working holiday (Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995).

Regarding the working holiday, this experience become more formalized beyond Europe with the establishment, in 1962, of the British Universities North America Club (BUNAC), a non-profit student club that offered work and volunteer exchange programs in the summer camps

and ski fields of North America (Wilson et al., 2010). Over the last decade, the working holiday industry has evolved to the point that on 2004 one could find over 800 organizations offering volunteering placements in 200 countries, in addition to 30 overseas paid work providers offering au pair and child-care employment, internships, sports instruction, seasonal work and teaching English as a foreign language (Jones, 2004).

By far, the most known destination for the working holiday experience is the United States of America, followed by Australia and Great Britain (Moisă, 2010). Annually, about 100,000 college students from around the world land on the USA with a J-1 visa, which allows them to work for three months and take an additional month to travel (Kammer, 2011). On table 1 is available the top 10 sending countries to the US, and the number of youngsters on a j-1 visa sent on 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010.

2004		2006		2008		2010	
Country	Seasonal Workers	Country	Seasonal Workers	Country	Seasonal Workers	Country	Seasonal Workers
Poland	18,691	Russia	23,642	Russia	27,517	Russia	21,823
Russia	9,962	Poland	13,435	Brazil	11,797	Ukraine	9,116
Bulgaria	6,993	Brazil	9,806	Turkey	9,940	Turkey	7,087
Slovakia	5,581	Bulgaria	8,756	Ukraine	9,488	Brazil	6,024
Brazil	5,477	Peru	6,158	Thailand	7,815	Thailand	6,008
Ireland	4,309	Ireland	5,946	Ireland	7,483	Ireland	5,213
Czech Republic	3,053	Thailand	5,505	Bulgaria	6,907	China	5,056
Peru	2,978	Romania	5,503	Peru	6,829	Bulgaria	4,860
Romania	2,901	Slovakia	5,174	Moldova	5,547	Moldova	4,072
Belarus	2,607	Turkey	4,728	Poland	4,580	Peru	3,388

Table 1 - Top 10 sending countries of youngsters on a j-1 visa. (Kammer, 2011, p.4).

Studies (eg. Bell, 2002; Inkson & Myers, 2003; Wilson et al., 2010) evaluating the working holiday experience's impact on the life of youngsters who join this kind of journey, have identified it as a "rite of passage", comprising similarities to Victor Turner's (1973) concept of pilgrimage. This author considered pilgrimage as "that form of institutionalized or "symbolic" "antistructure" (or perhaps "metastructure") which succeeds the major initiation rites of puberty in tribal societies as the dominant historical form"(V. Turner, 1973, p.204).

A *pilgrim* journey, the pilgrimage, is typically voluntary and it encompasses three essential phases: separation, transition (liminal) and reintegration (Arnould & Price, 1993). This journey, alike the working holiday one, temporarily removes the participants from their

preoccupation with small-group, convention-ridden, routinized daily life and places them into another context of existence, a “sacred precinct”, leading of the transitional phase (V. Turner, 1973).

In a traditional pilgrimage this “sacred precinct” - the destination - is a bounded place apart from ordinary settlement, drawing pilgrims from great distances as well as nearby, where myths are evoked by the site’s symbols and activities (V. Turner, 1973). As stressed by Moore (1980), the Walt Disney resort (site of the ICP), can be indeed regarded as such sacred place, strengthening then, the similarities on the working holiday being studied and the pilgrimage experiences.

Once away from their home country, the pilgrim is no longer an insider, in a taken-for-granted culture, and becomes an outsider somewhere else (Bell, 2002). Besides, as far as the pilgrim moves away from his home structural involvements his experience becomes increasingly sacralized on one hand and ever more secularized on the other. As explained by Victor Turner (1973, p.211):

He meets with more shrines and sacred objects as he advances, but he also encounters more real dangers such as bandits and robbers; he has to pay attention to the need to survive and often to earn money for transportation; and he comes across markets and fairs, especially at the end of his quest, where the shrine is flanked by the bazaar and by the fun fair. But all these things are more contractual, more associational, more volitional, more replete with the novel and the unexpected, fuller of possibilities of *communitas*, both as secular fellowship and comradeship and sacred communion, than anything he has known at home.

Therefore, on the transitional phase the world becomes a bigger place for the pilgrim. Suddenly, a vast sphere of options and experiences are opened for these youngsters, giving them the liberty to reconstruct themselves (Bell, 2002). On the working holiday journey, these experiences are enriched by the labor feature of the program. In fact, researches on labor (eg. Assis & Macêdo, 2010; Dejours & Deranty, 2010; Silva, 2011) have shown its importance on individual’s self construction. As Sigmund Freud has argued, work is a key factor for people’s cultural and social insertion and identification (Assis & Macêdo, 2010).

Furthermore, when the pilgrimage experience is socially shared, as it usually is, participants are prone to experience the *communitas* relations (V. Turner, 1973). That is, a feeling of camaraderie that occurs when individuals from various walks of life share a common bond of experience considered special or "sacred" by them (Celsi, Rose, & Leigh, 1993).

As for the reintegration phase (going back), it can be either a positive or negative sacred experience, depending upon how much the place has changed or how much of one's former identity, familiarity, and mastery is retained (Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry, 1989). In fact, these youngsters learn more about their home by stepping outside. This journey broadens their minds, letting them to see their home from another perspective (Bell, 2002).

Just as on the pilgrims return, they frequently bring back a token of the sacred place; a working holiday traveler brings home an inevitable cargo: photographs, material mementoes, exotic clothing, and tales of their adventures. Like the sacred tokens, these “souvenirs” serve both as proof that the journey has been completed and as a physical manifestation of the charisma of a sacred place (Bell, 2002).

The products brought from the working holiday decorate their houses, as statements and reminders of worldly experiences. These possessions are used to differentiate them from those who have never been away. Journey's stories are brought out in social conversation; but mostly with people who have been on the same experience (Bell, 2002). For these youngsters, the working holiday memories become part of what Belk (1988) has labeled as the extended self, explained on the next section.

2.4 CONSUMPTION, IDENTITY AND THE EXTENDED SELF

A central feature to contemporary society is that individuals does not make consumption choices solely from products' utilities, but also from their symbolic meaning (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). Thus, through consumption choices, people bring organizing forces to their own lives (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). That is, by acquiring things, we are telling others and ourselves who we are, as well as managing our identities and ensuring the continuity of the self across time.

Regarding the products symbolic meanings, Igor Kopytoff (2008) has called our attention for its market value metamorphosis through time. According to this author, just as individuals, things can present a biography, tell a story, and thus become singular, special. Therefore, even things that clearly have an exchange value (goods), can end up absorbing another value, non-pecuniary, that goes beyond the exchangeable price. For instance, a house, where a couple has

fostered their kids, may have embodied some precious family memories, and despite of its market value, this couple may regard it as priceless.

As we have explained before, the media plays an important role on the post-modern identity construction. At this juncture, advertisements broadcasted by the media are considered one of the major sources for the consumption symbolic meanings (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). Moreover, ads have been efficiently transferring these symbolic meanings to brands, turning brands into a valuable resource for the construction and maintenance of identity (Chaplin & John, 2005).

Given that, it is important to acknowledge an idiosyncratic character of the working holiday program analyzed on this research. In fact, the ICP is branded. The lived experience by its participants carries the Disney label. Without mentioning that the Disney Corporation is one of the most visible and successful examples of corporate and brand image building (Francoeur & Knox, 2004).

Other than just personal identifiers, consumption choices and brands have also become an efficient tool to bond social identities (communities) (Lamont & Molnár, 2001). These communities (sub-cultures of consumption) are distinctive subgroups of society that are gathered on the basis of a shared commitment to a particular product class, brand, or consumption activity (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Sub-cultures of consumption do not require individuals to be connected through networks or to engage in face-to-face contact (Lamont & Molnár, 2001), what enable them to transcend national boundaries, demographic cohorts, racial or ethnic differences, and distinct classes in their scope and influence.

In line with the concept of consumption as an important player on the identity construction, Belk has developed the idea of extended self. The key point of the extended self is recognizing that, knowingly or unknowingly, intentionally or unintentionally, we regard our possessions as parts of ourselves (Belk, 1988). The concept of possessions here, goes beyond the psychological and sociological resources, we have previously explained with the identity capital model, it also includes material objects, persons, places, and group possessions as well as body parts and vital organs.

According to Belk (1988) the boundary between what is “mine” and “me” is so tenuous and thus, possessions serve as symbolic expressions of the self. When we claim that something is “mine”, we also come to believe that the object is “me”. Likewise, an unintentional loss of possessions, as to theft and casualty, or when they are taken over by institutions, such as government and schools, may bring people to feel a regrettable loss of self. Therefore, our interaction with possessions, coupled with a reflection upon their meaning, enhances our sense of identity by establishing, maintaining, reproducing and transforming our self-definitions (Pierce, Kostova, & Dirks, 2001).

Hence, people’s identity can be characterized by what one can call “mine”; as his body and psychic powers, his wife and children, his work and organization, his land and bank account. Moreover, Pierce and colleagues (2001) argued that the psychological feeling of ownership (what is called “mine”) is given through three factors: controlling the possession, investing the Self into the possession, coming to intimately know the possession. For instance, in some organization, the greater are the employer’s autonomy, the opportunities for invest him-self into his work, and his acknowledgment about the organization, the stronger will be the psychological feeling of ownership towards the organizations.

Interestingly, regarding the control over a possession, Russell Belk has suggested that it works as a two-way inducer of the extended self. According to the author, alike control *over*, control *by* objects can also contribute to an item be felt as part of the self. In other words, “we may impose our identities on possessions and possessions may impose their identities on us” (Belk, 1988, p.141).

Actually, post-modern organizations are a good example of “possessions” that impose their identity on individuals. As explained by Yiannis Gabriel (2005), organizations’ control over its employees has become far subtler, yet much deeper. Indeed, when we join an organization we are submitted to pervasive and invasive controls (eg. cultural and ideological, structural, technological, spatial) that not merely constrain but define ourselves.

Nowadays, the employee is part of the organizational brand on show (Gabriel, 2005). On Organizations like Disney, the worker is no longer a person, but a sign (Baudrillard, 1996). As a result, it is expected from the staff and extremely important to the business that everyone behave by the company’s values (Maanen, 1990).

The extended self, alike all other complementary perspective we have explored on this theoretical background, regards the self as always under construction, being arranged and rearranged over time. Therefore on this study we are going to embrace this perspective of self, as something incomplete and always being processed, just like a “story that a person writes and rewrites about him or herself, never reaching the end until they die, and always rewriting the earlier parts, so that the activity of writing becomes itself part of the story” (Gabriel & Lang, 2006, p.83).

Furthermore, the literature review presented has shaded a light on some aspects that we should concern on our empirical study, as summed up below:

- 1- People are endowed with a multiplicity of identities.
- 2- The self is one's identities synthesis, the feeling of continuity that somehow remains the same over time.
- 3- On contemporary society community-oriented policies where replaced by market-oriented ones. Consequently, consumption and brands have become valuable resources for the construction and maintenance of identities.
- 4- Just as every rite of passage, the ICP, a working holiday pilgrimage, leaves significant traces on its participants' self, accounting on the way they become identified.
- 5- This traces are also reinforced by the labor feature of the program, once work can be considered an important identity capital.
- 6- Traces of someone's identities are also perceived on his/her goods.
- 7- While people tell their story, they organize events and objects into a meaningful whole (their self).

3. THE RESEARCH

As stated by Mintzberg (1979, p.584), “data don’t generate theory – only researchers do that”. Therefore, is important to acknowledge that every scientific research is developed upon a paradigmatic thinking which comprises a form and nature of reality (ontology), how the researcher comes to know that reality (epistemology), and how the researcher can systematically access what can be known about that reality (methodology) (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The present research is grounded on an interpretive paradigm. This paradigm regards the reality as subjective and thus agrees that, “a deeper understanding of a phenomenon is only possible through understanding the interpretations of that phenomenon from those experiencing it” (Shah & Corley, 2006, p.1823). Those involved on the phenomenon can interpret it differently; leaving room for multiple social realities. Assuming that, the researcher will have to rigorously gather and understand these distinct interpretations in order to develop his own interpretations of the phenomenon. The researcher’s final interpretation has to primarily make sense to the informants who experienced it, than be plausible to uninformed others, and became viably expressed in relation to current theory.

With our ontological and epistemological perspectives briefly explained, we are now going to expose the methodology adopted to reach our findings.

3.1 METHOD

In order to explore our object of research, we developed a qualitative case study. It was performed qualitatively because, as suggested by Rynes and Gephart (2004), this is the propitious approach to understand the meaning and beliefs underlying some behavior.

According to Stake (1998), a case is a bonded system, which in this study comprises the ICP alumni identity. Moreover, by understanding this identity we hope to provide insights on how similar experiences can brand an organization image into someone’s identity. Therefore this research concerns an instrumental case study.

To study the case, to probe its particularities, besides collecting data from those informants through whom the case can be known, a researcher has also to investigate the nature of the case (its activity and functioning), its historical background, its physical setting and other contexts, such as economic, political, legal and aesthetic (Stake, 1998). Therefore, we started our research by exploring the field where the case is embedded, explained hereafter.

3.1.1 The Disney International College Program

The Walt Disney International College Program is an international internship program sponsored by The Walt Disney Company, exclusively for students (18 years and older) who are currently enrolled in an accredited college or university from outside the United States and are pursuing a three or four-years degree. Participants in this program work at the Walt Disney World Resort during their summer break on a J-1 Summer Work -Travel Visa. The summer work experience is, at maximum, four month length and candidates must exit the United States and return to their home country upon completion of the program. (<https://www.disneyinternationalprograms.com>, Retrieved July 15, 2012)

Like most Disney stories begin ...

Once upon a time, in the spring of 1980, a group of Disney leaders wondered what would happen if they traveled to a few universities in the south and offered college students an opportunity to work at the Magic Kingdom Park for the summer. The offer was exciting enough to attract nearly 250 students from the University of Alabama, University of Georgia and University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill to spend their summer in Florida. ("Disney College Program," n.d.)

The prototype of the Disney College program happened in 1980. The pioneer experience was a great success for the students and the company and it led to the establishment of the Magic Kingdom College Program in 1981. The college program followed the Walt Disney World Resort growth. On 2005, eight thousand American student`s took part of it (NBCNEWS.com, 2005).

The program has also gone international. Recruiters from Disney Worldwide Services, Inc. have been traveling all over the world to interview individuals who are excited about Disney International Programs opportunities. Brazilians students have been recruited since 1997. (Gonsalez, 2011)

Nowadays, Disney Worldwide Services, Inc. works with the help of some companies to recruit candidates for the ICP. These companies known as their Procurement Allies not only

establish initial contact with potential candidates, but also conduct the first interview, organize and invite candidates to a Disney presentation and assist all selected candidates with their pre-arrival paperwork and setting up travel arrangements to the United States. In Brazil the Disney procurement ally is STB (Student Travel Bureau), a student travel and education abroad agency. (<https://www.disneyinternationalprograms.com>, retrieved July 15, 2012)

Annually, almost thirty thousand of Brazilians apply for the Disney International College Program (Gonsalez, 2011). From all these contestants, about eight hundred are selected to spend their summer vacation working as Cast Members, in front line roles at the Walt Disney World's Theme Parks and Resort Hotels (Sala de Imprensa - STB, 2011). These participants earn an hourly rate of pay ranging from \$7.67 to \$8.90 USD per hour, depending on the role they are selected to perform.

The purpose of the ICP is centered in three main "experiences": "living", "learning" and "earning" (<http://cp.disneycareers.com>, retrieved July 19, 2012). While in the program, the international students live in one of the four housing complexes (Vista Way, Chatham Square, Patterson Court, and The Commons) that are exclusive for Disney Internships and Programs participants. The apartment complexes feature two to four bedroom apartments and all bedrooms are shared by two people. Students are assigned into the houses based on a number of factors such as, arrival and departure dates, gender, and age (over or under 21). Housing costs range from \$82-108 USD per week, depending on the size of the apartment and the amenities offered at the complex. Students are expected to follow certain guidelines in the housing complexes. All participants receive the full list of Community Codes when they check-in on their arrival date. They are asked to read all of the guidelines and sign the form to show they understand and will comply with all codes.

The "Learning" experience flourishes with the multicultural environment. They say that everyone is encouraged to achieve both personal and professional growth. Disney International Programs participants have the opportunity to learn from experienced Disney professionals. They can also take advantage of valuable resources at the Cast Service Centers or Disney Learning Centers, which are self-directed career resource centers located throughout the Walt Disney World Resort.

The "Earning" experience consists in being on a paid-internship at the Walt Disney World Resort. In addition to the weekly payment, the cast members can enjoy leisure rewards as free Theme park admission and discounts at select Walt Disney World dining, merchandise, and recreation locations.

While on the program, these youngsters become part of the "Disney spectacle". In fact, Disney employees are called Cast members, their specific job is called a role and the attire they wear while working is a costume. People visiting are never customers, they are "guests". Moreover, whenever they are in touch with a guest they are actually "on stage" and the staff only areas are called back stage.

As much as it may look like a "dream", working at Disney can be not as "magical" as it seems. Most of the participants of the program have to go through some tough times. Many Brazilian youngsters who board on the ICP are going to live abroad for the first time, for others Disney is going to be their first employer. Cultural diversity, the foreign language, sharing an apartment with strangers and dropping their standard of living are some of the difficulties that students might have to overcome.

Next, after understanding the case context, we began to gather data from Brazilian ICP alumni.

3.1.2 Data Collection

As explained on the theoretical background chapter, we understand identity as something always under construction, being processed. In accordance, Giddens (1991) have stated that an identity lies in the "capacity to keep a particular narrative going on". Therefore, we've opted for collect and analyze the data through a narrative inquire method.

According to Chase (2005) a narrative, whether oral or written, is a distinct kind of discourse with a retrospect meaning making. That is, by telling their story, people are organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, as well as connecting and seeing its consequences over time. In addition narratives also express emotions, thoughts, and interpretations, as the narrator's point of view; thus it highlights the uniqueness of each human action and event rather than the common properties.

Most of the data was collected through in-depth interviews conducted with eight Brazilians ICP alumni. The informants were from distinctive cities and had been on different programs (different years). Interviews lasted from one hour to an hour and a half. For a qualitative research, the data quality is more important than the number of interviews (McCracken, 1988). Thus, on this stage we were interested on the variety of representations that our informants could provide us. Given that, we have stopped interviewing based on Bauer and Aarts(2002) saturation strategy. These authors suggest that researchers should cease interviews once new informants can't add anything new to the study; to be precise, when none additional data is observed.

In line with the narrative inquire method, during interviews we aimed on transform the interviewer-interviewee relationship into a narrator and listener one. Therefore, we approached to our informants, regarding them as narrators with stories to tell and voices of their own, rather than providers of answers to our questions.

To facilitate the conduction of interviews we carefully developed a guide, which worked much more as invitations to interviewees tell us their story, than as a questionnaire. Thus, we started our interviews as suggested by McCracken (1988) on his book *The Long Interview*, with a “grant tour”, asking the informants ordinary question about their life (eg. Home state, what do they do for living, size of their family). After that, we asked them to try to go back to the time when they found out about the Disney program and tell us what happened since then. When they finished their stories, we asked some things about their behaviors today, that still could be attached to their work experience at Disney.

Some interviews were conducted by a former cast member, and others were conducted with the assistance of another person who had never been on the program. This strategy was adopted in order to enrich the data. We have assumed that “a narrative is a joint production of narrator and listener, whether the narrative arises in naturally occurring talk, an interview, or a field work (Chase, 2005, p.657)”. Thus, the stories people tell are flexible, and can change depending on the audience. Some ICP's participants could be more comfortable to share their experiences with one of them. Although, the presence of an outsider, who didn't know about the program, could make them explain it more carefully, as they wouldn't have the assumption that the listener already knows what they are talking about.

The interviews occurred in March of 2013. They were all recorded and transcribed. Some relevant informants' characteristics were summarized on Table 2. In order to maintain informants' privacy, their names won't be disclosed on the study. Instead, they are going to be identified by their favorite Disney character.

Some informants, and other ICP former participants that we got in touch, had maintained an on-line blog while they were on the program, which they used as a journal. Thus, some of our data was also gathered from these journals. In addition, we have collected some alumni testimonials concerning the program on social networks such as Facebook and Orkut.









Favorite D. Character	Age	First time on The program	Returned (Times)	Role	Hometown	Sex	Interview Length (hr.)
 Genie (Gênio)	27	2004	No	Attractions	Niterói – RJ	Male	1:00
 Goofy (Pateta)	23	2010	No	Merchandise	Niterói – RJ	Female	1:05
 Flik	35	2008	Yes (1)	Merchandise	Fortaleza – CE	Female	1:34
 Donald Duck (Pato Donald)	22	2009	Yes (4)	Attractions	Fortaleza – CE	Male	1:30
 Mickey Mouse	31	2004	No	Custodial	Porto Alegre – RS	Female	1:00
 Daisy (Margarida)	29	2005	Yes (2)	Food and Beverage	Belo Horizonte – MG	Female	1:00
 Stich	26	2005	No	Character	Rio de Janeiro – RJ	Male	1:31
 Ariel	28	2005	Yes (2)	Food and Beverage	Recife – PE	Female	1:10

Table 2: Informants characteristics

3.1.3 Data Analyses

When it comes to interpreting narrative heard during interviews, narrative researches begin with narrator's voices and stories, thereby extending the narrator-listener relationship and the active work of listening into an interpretative process. (...) Rather than locating distinct themes across interviews, narrative researches listen first to the voices *within* each narrative.(Chase, 2005, p.663)

This stage of the research was performed with the assistance of Atlas TI (software). Concerning the use of CAQDAS (Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software) in researches, Bandeira-de-Melo (2006) have reminded us that interpreting and understand the meaning of a text is yet an exclusive ability of human beings. The usefulness of these programs is on performing mechanical tasks of a qualitative study, such as the management of the database and the elements constructed by the researcher during the analysis process.

We analyzed our data based on Chase's (2005) suggestions on the narrative inquiry method. According to the author, besides being a distinct kind of discourse, a narrative is also a verbal action. "Among other things, narrators explain, entertain, inform, defend, complain, and confirm or challenge the status quo (Chase, 2005, p.657)." Hence, it's important to acknowledge that each story teller has a particular voice, that will depend on what and how s/he communicates as much as from where (the subject position or social location) s/he speaks.

Given that, Chase (2005) recommends to, instead of organize the transcripts into themes (constructs), focus on connections among the various stories an informant tells over the interview. Through this strategy we are able to verify the way each interviewee juxtaposed and navigated through their identities. Furthermore, it draws attention to the complexity within each informant's voice as well to the diversity of that voices (eg. individualistic, group oriented).

In order to attend to similarities and differences across narratives, Chase (2005) reminds that stories are both enabled and constrained by a range of social resources and circumstances. This allows us to find out patterns in the storied selves, subjectivities and realities that narrators create during particular times and in particular places.

Chase (2005) acknowledges that, in agreement with the paradigm of this study, the researcher is also a narrator, as s/he develops interpretations and finds ways in which to express the

narratives s/he has studied. While reporting the findings, a researcher separates his from the informant's voice, once in this phase s/he has a different interest from the interviewee in the story.

3.2 ICP ALUMNI IDENTITY

“You can design, and create, and build the most wonderful place in the world. But it takes people to make the dream a reality.” (Disney, 2001, p.95)

First, it is worthy to highlight the Brazilian's alumni acceptance, and their support on this study development. Every former cast member¹ contacted offered help and was ready to collaborate with information. They were excited on telling their Disney history. When asked to be interviewed, they've replied things like: “Have a coffee and talk about Disney is something that I would really enjoy”. Therefore, since the beginning, it was possible to notice they were proud of their experience as they felt honored to have contributed to the “Disney dream”. Indeed, the Alumni Identity was something that they fancy and would like to show off.

In order to tell the story of the Disney alumni identity construction, we will describe their pilgrimage, since their acknowledgement about it, including the separation, transition (liminal) and reintegration stages.

3.2.1 Separation stage:

“She believed in dreams, alright, but she also believed in doing something about them. When Prince Charming didn't come along, she went over to the palace and got him.” (Walt Disney, speaking of Cinderella)

Every year, thousands of Brazilian students apply for an internship position at the Disney International College Program (ICP) and, after a harsh selection process, some manage to get in. The Walt Disney World Resort is a popular destination among Brazilians tourists. Hence, most of the people who join the ICP have already been there as a guest before, usually in their childhood or adolescence, and have loved the experience. Furthermore, being in a cultural exchange, living abroad and being fluent in English has become more frequently required on

¹ Disney's way of referring to their employees.

the job market. Without mentioning that the Disney Company name, a well succeeded global organization, would enrich any youngster CV.

Given that, the program is becoming increasingly popular and thus, the application requires some preparation efforts. On the internet, contestants can find tips for interviews, dressing codes, resumé preparation, all in line with Disney recruiter's expectations. In addition, just as open and accessible they were to us; applicants can always find some ICP alumni willing to help, to coach them through this process.

The ICP Alumni that we have talked to have reported to find out about the ICP through posters placed on their universities walls or by people who had already been on the program. Actually, being in touch with a former participant can be a great motivator. As Daisy has told us, some people like her, who were not sure about applying, have made their minds by talking to some ICP alumni.

The selection process is comprised by two phases. First, participants must attend to a lecture about the program and to an interview. This phase is organized and performed by the STB staff, and happens around late April and May. Then, contestants approved on the first phase, proceed to the second one, which also concerns a Talk and an interview.

The second phase usually takes place in São Paulo and in Rio de Janeiro or Belo Horizonte. Youngsters from other Brazilian states, who want to join the program, will have to travel to one of these cities in order to accomplish the second stage. This phase happens around August or September, when Disney international recruiters came to Brazil to meet and interview ICP contestants.

Once they have found out about the program, some had to strive more than others to get accepted. For instance, while telling us about the selection process, Donald Duck has emphasized how he and some of his Disney's friends have struggled in order to become a cast member. He has told us that, after finding out about the program, he met other Brazilian contestants on-line. He found a community on a social network (Orkut) and took part of it. Then, they've created a chat group on MSN, with 15 youngsters, in which they used to chat every day to share ICP news and tips to the selection process. In addition, they used to schedule Skype video calls every week, to practice interviews. They did it for several months,

and by the end of the selection process, they were close friends. In fact, one of these internet pals, who used to live in São Paulo, has hosted Donald at his house, for the second phase.

The acceptance on the program, as highlighted by all of them, is a remarkable moment. They usually acknowledge through a phone call or e-mail some long weeks (as they've reported) after their second interview.

"I was in college, and since the interview I used to check every day my e-mail box, as well as the e-mail trash, to make sure that the e-mail wasn't identified as a Spam. I did it every day... The e-mail finally came! When I read: "Congratulations ..." I yelled: "I did it!" and suddenly everyone was looking at me. I couldn't control it! I was so excited! I couldn't believe it! My heart was beating fast! When I knew I was approved on the first interview I was already glad... But this second one... I was maddened!" (Mickey)

And according to Donald Duck, who has been more than one time on the program, receiving the Disney "Yes" is always a good moment.

"It's such happiness impossible to describe! And it always made me happy. Independently of the number of times that I've went on a Disney program, being accepted by Disney is always incredible... It's such a feeling..." (Donald)

Once approved on the selection process, contestants will continue to face some challenges ahead. Aside from arranging all documents needed for the visa approval, they will need a formal letter from their university consenting their participation on the program. And this letter can be hard to get, once their departure date can precede their summer vacation.

"I was so happy! But then, I had a new challenge: I would have to convince all my professors to haste my final exams in order to get released by the University." (Mickey)

Genie has also highlighted how he had to go all-out, in order to get rid of his university's assignments and be able to embark:

"I didn't have much time to get anxious about the program... I had to work so hard to convince my professors to release me earlier, to get through all my school assignment. I only managed to get rid from school work two days prior to my embark date. When I had time to think about it, I was going to travel in two days!" (Genie)

Being ready for departure is also a progression. Some of these youngsters have never been abroad, nor have stayed this much time away from home. On his web blog, Genie has reported that some of his old friends and family have gathered a small Farewell party the day

before he left. And, in order to explain how he was feeling he used an Amyr Klink, a Brazilian famous sailor, quote:

“It is not a celebration, but a departure. Farewells even less. Somehow I was gone. Felt the ground unstable, distant, longing for those who were still present.” (Genie quoting Amyr Klink)

Stich, who went on the program in 2005, has told us that he still remembers the day he embarked.

“I had never been outside of Brazil. I had never been to Disney. It was my first international trip. (...) It was raining, and I was starting to wonder if the flight would delay. I was by myself on the plane, listening to the air plane music radio. I remember the moment the plane took off... It was playing “Wake me up When September ends”. I dunno... It seemed like I was goin’ to another dimension.” (Stich)

Given all we have reported, concerning the separation stage, is possible to observe that the ICP is not a take for granted, nor an easily acquired experience. In order to become a cast member, besides desiring it, contestants will have to spend time and effort fighting for it. Just as the identity capital, or the extended self, participants will have to invest their self to take part of, as described on the program’s Facebook official fan page, a unique group of people who now span an entire generation.

Moreover, on the separation stage we start to get a hint on some *communitas* relations. This feeling of camaraderie was observed not only among future journey colleges, but also with former cast members, willing on helping contestants through the selection process.

3.2.2 Transition stage:

“They will be the people who give, who like to bring delight to other people, and therefore gain pleasure and satisfaction for themselves.” (Disney, 2001, p.259)

Once removed from their “natural habitat” ICP participants will get into, as known among the Disney Alumni community, an “emotional roller coaster”, full of ups and downs, sometimes even including a loop, which have turned their word up-side down. In order to describe this ride, we will start by their first impressions on the living and working experience.

Living:

As we have said before, there is a lot of information about the program available on the internet. Ariel has told us:

“I had looked, researched a lot before going. I had read a lot on the internet. I thought I had an idea... had seen pictures, knew about the housing...” (Ariel)

And, while they surf around all this information, the future Disney cast members start to imagine, and create expectations about how will be their “fairy tale” on Disney World. They envision themselves living with friends on the back yard of the Cinderella castle, working in a theme park, having a problem-free routine with a lot of free time to enjoy the Disney World Resort. Although, when they arrive there, most of these expectations aren’t met. As Genie has reported on his blog:

“Eventually I realized that this experience will be totally different than what I had expected. Life is not going to be easy... But it is on hard times that we get the chance to grow up.” (Genie)

First, as reported before, ICP participants can be assigned to live in one of the four college program housing complexes. They acknowledge, when they apply for the program, that they won’t be able to choose where they will live, nor with whom they will share the apartment. Still, it seems that they only realize this fact when they check in, and for some, this can be the first break down.

As Ariel has told us, most of the people prior to the program, imagine themselves living in Vista Way.

“On 2005, besides the housing complexes (by that time there was only 3), they also used an old Disney hotel, the Tree House, to host the ICP participants, and I end up living there. When I found out where I was going to live I became so upset... You know... I wanted to live at Vista.”(Ariel)

Vista, as the alumni community calls it, is the largest and oldest complex. It was built in 1980’s, and has been housing cast members since then. It is the most popular complex among Disney Alumni, for its stories and party atmosphere. This complex is also the main transportation hub for the buses driving them to work.

Then, after receiving their apartment key, it is time for new ICPs to meet their room-mates, which can also be a surprise, either good or bad. As reported by Goofy on his blog:

“As soon as I got to Vista, I’ve found out that I would be sharing my apartment with 4 Americans and one Brazilian. I think it’s going to be great, since it’s going to be a good chance to improve my English. Besides, the Brazilian girl, who is my roommate, is a sweetheart!” (Goofy)

Although meeting the new roommates wasn’t that pleasant for Genie:

“When I first got in to the apartment I got kind of scared. It had a lot of disposable cups spread through the floor, pizza slices... Man, the apartment was filthy... I am sharing it with three American guys. My roommate Josh, with whom I share the bedroom, has given me a weird first impression. I’ve tried to start a conversation with him, but something wasn’t right... he seemed unpleasant, thus I didn’t give much attention to it. Suddenly, another apartment mate, Joey has called me to have a talk and explained me that Josh had a mental problem; his mental age was a little delayed. I looked again to that mess... and had an inevitable feeling: What am I doing here?” (Genie)

By the end of the day things got all right for Genie, as do for most of the participants. Joey wiped all the dirt and taught him how things worked on the housing complex, with the best will. And Josh, he was very quiet. After a while he began to talk normally to Genie, who became happy to be sharing the room with someone he could trust. As summed up by Ariel:

“At first, it was a shock, as I believe it is for everybody... The food, living by yourself, cooking... Things like that. But then you get used to it, and start to enjoy it!” (Ariel)

Working:

After settling down, the new ICPs² will have an intensive routine on the next few days, in order to get ready to work. On the first meeting with the Disney people in charge of the program they are welcomed and taught all the bureaucracy concerning the program. On this meeting they also sign some contracts, open a bank account, and are provided with a social security number.

On the next day the ICPs are introduced to the organization they now belong. Every new cast member is presented to the Disney’s culture in a coaching session named “Traditions”, and that’s when most of them find out that the Walt Disney World is definitely not “A Small World, After All”. Actually, it covers 40 square miles, which is about the size of San Francisco or two Manhattan islands. Along these 25,000 acres, with a quarter designated as a

² While on the program the participants are also called inside Disney by ICPs.

wilderness preserve, one will find four theme parks, two water parks, 18 owned and operated resort hotels (with a total of approximately 24,000 rooms), vacation club properties, a retail, dining and entertainment complex (Downtown Disney), a sports complex, conference centers, campgrounds, golf courses, and other recreational facilities designed to attract visitors for an extended stay (*The Walt Disney Company: Fiscal Year 2012 Annual Financial Report and Shareholder Letter*, 2013)³.

“The Traditions takes place at the Disney University. It’s an intensive day talking about Disney, and everything was new to me. “Disney owns this”... Wow! “Disney owns that”... Oh My...! “Disney operates that many billions dollars per year”... And I start to wonder: what am I doing here? Who am I? This section was very important to know the place I was.” (Stich)

Thus, given the size of the Walt Disney World, not everyone will end up working on their dreamed position or on their favorite theme park. Hence, finding out their work location can be a moment of frustration for some ICPs.

“On traditions I found out I was going to work at the Polynesian hotel, and I got very mad. I was angry because I have gone all that way to work at Disney... I wanted to work in a theme park, not in a hotel.”(Mickey)

It’s also during “Traditions” the company’s values and goals (Disney’s Basics) are presented, which are (*Disney Traditions Handout*, 2008):

- "I project a positive image and energy" - smile, look approachable, look happy and interested, model the Disney Look, keep conversations positive.
- "I am courteous and respectful to all guests, including children" - make eye contact and smile, engage in guest interaction, treat guests as individuals, greet and welcome each guest, thank all guests and invite them back.
- "I stay in character and play the part" - preserve and protect the magic, provide excellent show quality and safety, perform role efficiently by reducing hassles and inconveniences.
- “I go above and beyond”- anticipate needs and offer assistance, create surprises and Magical Moments, provide immediate service recovery.

These rules of thumb are handed to the new cast members with such an incredible emotional appeal, persuading them about its importance. This is easily verified on Goofy’s testimony:

³ Disney property map can be found on appendix, figure 1.

“The Traditions is wonderful! From that day I begun to really know and understand the Disney Company... Its values ... The Disney’s basics! For me, the Disney’s basics aren’t just useful to the work environment ... I practice its lessons trough my daily life! I believe the Disney Basics are important values... They are very helpful!”
(Goofy)

The traditions emotional appeal is even more evident on Flik’s report:

“As I’ve been on the program twice, I got the chance attend to Traditions two times. During Traditions, the coaches show us a movie about Walt Disney’s life. On the second time I’ve watched it, after had already been on a cast member shoes, my eyes filled with tears. Walt is my hero.”(Flik)

Then, after some time spent at the Disney University, learning about the Disney Company, watching videos, doing scavenger hunts, the new cast members are taken to visit the Magic Kingdom’s (the main theme park) back stage (staff only area).

“We left Disney University toward the Magic Kingdom backstage. And for god’s sake... What is that!? Is huge...The tunnels... It’s Amazing! When people go to Magic Kingdom they don’t have a clue of what is behind that magical environment.”
(Goofy)

On Magic Kingdom, subsequently to a quick talk, they are oriented to go on stage (public space) and observe cast members performing the Disney’s basics. Going on stage for the first time, according to some alumni, is a remarkable moment.

“I was amazed! I was amazed with that tunnels’ system... With the pathways... I remember when I opened the door, and went on stage for the first time on Main Street... I have no words to describe that moment. It was really cool... was awesome!” (Donald)

At last, the ICPs return to Disney University for a final talk. During this talk, someone knocks the door, and guess what?! It’s Mickey Mouse!

“The moment the boss (Mickey Mouse) comes in people freak out. It’s a moment of collective catharsis... I remember I thought everything was pretty funny.” (Stich)

As reported by Goofy on his blog, Mickey comes in to make them a surprise. He hands the new cast members their Disney ID and their name tags. Given all the intensity and thrill going on during traditions, ICP alumni have reported that this was when they realize they were a cast member.

“The Traditions gives you a sense of belonging to something very cool, very large, very traditional, which has lasted a long time. So, there was when I really pulled on the Disney shirt.” (Genie)

In short, throughout traditions the new cast members become aware of what Disney is. Despite some have reported that had already been there before, as a guest, on public spaces, they've never seen the backstage before. And, according to Goofy that's when you realize what is needed to keep the show going on. A lot of people are required for “keeping the magic alive”. They learn it is all connected. And the coaches emphasize that every single cast member, independent of their role or location of work, is important in order to keep the resort working. Then, the new cast member feels s/he is special and is really part of the “Disney dream”.

The day after traditions, the ICPs visit their site of work, and learn more particularities about this location. Every place in the Walt Disney World Resort is themed, has a story behind it, and it is part of a cast member job to acknowledge it while playing their role. Besides, while on their role, cast members wear costumes⁴, provided by the company, which is also related to their work location. As reported by ICP alumni, trying on their costume is a very comic and sometimes tragic moment. They find the Disney sizing is all “messed up”. Moreover, the costumes are funny; they were not designed to make cast members look beautiful or attractive, but to insert them on the “Disney show”.

“When they took us to try our costume we had a lot of fun... mocking one another... people get so funny in some costumes...” (Goofy)

Thereafter, the new ICPs will spend a few more days training specifically for their positions. Depending on the role, they return to the Disney University for some lessons before “getting their hands dirty”. While on training, either on Disney University or on their work location they wear their name tags, with a little red band attached below it, where is written “earning my ears”⁵.

“After learning how to handle the money and run the cashier, at the Disney University, I started to be trained on my location. There, I was trained by a very nice old man... Jack King was his name. It last about three days, and then he told me it was time to take off the “earning my ears” band... I got so scared. But everything went all right.” (Flik)

⁴ Examples of cast member costumes can be found on appendix, figure 2.

⁵ A picture of name tag with the “earning my ears” band can be found on appendix, figure 3.

Once they have raised their “imaginary ears”, these cast members will get in touch and interact with thousands of people every day. They will “make the magic” as well as enjoy it. They will get into the theme parks for free, and have fun there, innumerable times, never getting tired of it. Some have said they used to feel like the luckiest people in the world.

Daily routine:

As we were told, most of the ICPs actually don't have a routine. As the Walt Disney World Resort is open every day, all the time, they need people working 24 hours a day. Thus, the ICP working schedule varies a lot and they hardly ever have a day off on weekends or holidays. Though, according to Daisy, she didn't find that a problem. In fact, she liked it. She believes that ICPs are dynamic people, moved by novelty and, when you work at Disney each day is different, which was very nice.

Moreover, we have found out that most of the ICPs end up getting in to a workaholic routine. They get paid by hour, thus the more they work the larger is going to be their pay check. In addition, every time they work more than 8 hours a day, or more than 40 hours a week, they are paid one hour and a half for each extra hour worked.

“For some time I was decided to make money. In fact, I end up making some money to pay my traveling expenses, to buy a lot of stuff and still left some dollars that I brought back to Brazil. But I had worked a lot... very much!” (Stich)

The ICPs arrive to work at Disney all through November and leave until March. This means that they will be working there on Christmas and New Year's Eve period (December), which is one of the resort's highest seasons. Thus, the ICPs' 32 hours regular work schedule, turn naturally into 40, 50 hours one. Furthermore, for those avid to work, they can also enroll for extra-hours offered on-line, through the Disney Hub (cast members intranet). These extra hours can be either on their work place, or in any other resort location, since the cast members has already done all the training required for the particular work.

“I remember that on the weekend between Christmas and New Year's Eve we were allowed to work double time. Double time is when between one day shift and the next you have less than 8 hours to rest. When this happens you get paid twice on the second day. Then, on that week I have worked 76 hours and still had a day off. It was crazy! During the day, I've worked as a character, which was my role, and at night I

applied for some extra hours in a hotel restaurant, where I've worked as a steward (dish washer).”(Stich)

The extra hour system, besides being used to make money, some ICPs regards it as a way to explore the Disney World. Every extra hour they apply, they have the chance to explore a different backstage, to meet other cast members, to find out how this other location works. In addition, some ICPs, who didn't end up working on their dreamed location, also apply for extra hours in order work on this special place.

“At first I didn't like to work at a hotel, but I end up enjoying it. My schedule was very nice. And I always had time to do some extra hours wherever I wanted. When I found out about the extra hours on-line, my problem was over! I usually worked at the hotel until 3pm. Then, I always assigned for the same extra-hours available at the Magic Kingdom from 5 till 8 pm, to work as parade audience control. There, while working I used to watch the night parade, and the fireworks show every day! This was awesome! Gosh, I used to feel as I was the best... that I was rocking!” (Mickey)

These ICP alumni have revealed to us that the nice feeling of belonging, of being a cast member which they've felt on Traditions was renewed once and while on their work routine:

“I used to have a good work routine. I hardly got stressed. The work environment was great! Disney is a place where people, working or visiting, are naturally prone to be happy. It is a pleasurable place to work. Complicated situations, as a visitor problem, can be easily handled there. Disney gives you many tools, so you can make guests' day the best. And to do it is really rewarding” (Genie)

In addition, this feeling wasn't only renewed on their work, but also whenever they went to one of the resort's theme parks to have fun.

“Whenever I watched Wishes (a firework show that takes place on Cinderella Castle surrounds) I had such a good feeling. I was so proud. It was amazing to realize that I was part of that, that I took part on the Disney dream.”(Stich)

However, as most of the things in life, the Disney college program experience is not only made of sunny days. In fact, as Genie realized as soon as he got there, life wasn't easy. This youngster may have to deal with impolite and rude people and the stress will come. The Extra Magic Hours (extended theme park hours), will turn into “Extra Tragic Hours”. They will get tired for working so hard and sleeping so little. Moreover, sadness can come by whenever they remember and miss the loved ones left home.

But, as they have told us, whenever they had been on a hard time or day, they had always found a friendly shoulder to lean on. And, along the program, the ICPs end up becoming a family, as Donald has told us:

“My best friends I have met at Disney. I regard them as brothers! It’s funny because I had pals before the ICP... some that I knew since I was a little boy. Although, I don’t know none of them as I do my Disney brothers. After sharing that three special months with them, makes me feel like I’ve seen their real nature.” (Donald)

Every alumni that we got in touch with, have reported finding friends for life at Disney. Just as family, they weren’t close to, or got along with everyone in the program, but they agreed to have something special in common. They went through some disagreements. For sometimes they have laugh together and for others cried together. They actually manage to experience the *communitas* feeling, explained on the theoretical background section.

Besides their friends, there were other things that also helped them to heal from a bad day. These things had to do with others’ gratitude to their work as Cast members, either guests or co-workers. While on work, the ICPs are supposed to create “magical moment” in people’s lives, and they can become extremely happy whenever they accomplish it.

“A smile on a child’s face, followed by the parents’ glad reaction can be priceless. You get happy by doing something special for someone else! It is such a good feeling!” (Goofy)

In fact this good feeling reported by Goofy, depending on the guest may turn into a “magical moment” for the very cast member. As Flik and Stich have told us, assisting a Make-a-Wish Foundation guest changes you. This international foundation is a Disney Company partner committed to grant the wishes of children with life-threatening medical conditions. According to the Make-a-Wish website (<http://worldwish.org>, Retrieved on August 1st, 2013) a Disney wish is one of the most popular wishes they receive and, working together with the Disney Company, for thirty years, they have managed to grant more than 75,000 wishes. The ill kids, who are granted with the Disney wish, travel to the Walt Disney World Resort accompanied by his/her parents and siblings, with all expenses covered.

“I remembered how I felt whenever I got in touch with a Make-a-Wish family. The kid was usually visibly ill, some couldn’t even move. When you approach to one of this kids, and they look at you smiling... It is an indescribable feeling! Then, you see their family members glad to be sharing all together what might be that child last

happy moment... It is something that touches you deep in your heart! And suddenly you realize how small your problems really are.” (Stich)

Other than the guests’ recognition, our informants have reported that they’ve also experienced it from their work colleagues. In fact, the Disney Company provides a simple, still symbolic way that favors cast members to demonstrate their recognition for each other’s job, “the Great Service Fanatic Card”⁶. Whenever one cast member ponders that a work colleague has done a good job, he can grant the other with this card. On the top of the Great Service Fanatic Card is written: “You made a Difference!” Then, there are some blanks to be filled with the person who stands out name, the one who recognized name and the reason for the recognition. As our informants told us, winning it is not a rare event, but it can make your day. Goofy told us that once he felt very special when receiving a Great Service Fanatic Card:

“Once I received a Great Fanatic card from a person who I didn’t even know. While I was working, a merchandise manager walked through my location. He observed me and then left with my manager this little card praising my job. Gosh, that made me so happy! I spent the rest of that day walking one side to the other with that card... Showing it to everybody. I even took a photo of it! My job was recognized from a completely stranger! This was awesome!”(Goofy)

Interestingly, just as was noticed on other working holiday experiences, the ICP brings home an inevitable cargo: a lot of photographs, souvenirs and, on the ICPs case, lot of Disney merchandise. We have learned that during the Holidays Season (mid-November until mid-January) the regular cast member’s discount (20%) on Disney merchandise increases to 40%. Moreover, besides working exposed to Disney merchandise, the ICPs spend most of their leisure time on the Disney property that is, they find and are tempted to buy Disney products everywhere they go.

As we could observe this transitional stage is featured by an intense working routine, but is also filled with parties, “magical moments” and fun. The ICPs definitely rides through an emotional rollercoaster while on the program. And, as we were told, just as the actual ride, the time passes so fast. Those three months fly, and when they realize it their graduation party is already on the corner.

⁶ A picture of a “Great Service Fanatic Card” can be found on appendix, fig. 4.

When the college program is coming to an end, Disney throws a graduations party for the participants who are leaving. On this party they wear the “Disney graduation ears”⁷ and receive a diploma, for completing the program, from the boss’s (Mickey Mouse) hand. Suddenly it is already time to go home, even though most of them don’t want to go home yet.

“I felt as it wasn’t time to go home... I didn’t want to go home! I was devastated that I had to leave” (Daisy)

This is also clearly observed on Stich story:

“When the program was coming to an end, I didn’t want to go back home, as I believe 98% of the ICPs. Thus, I went to talk to my manager, to beg her to extend my program. Although, she told me she couldn’t do it because Disney had an agreement with the Brazilian government, in which the company would only keep the student on the US during their summer vocation, and my vacation would end soon. Then I told her: “I really want to stay... Please, tell me what I have to do.” She laughed and said: “To stay, you would have to prove to Disney that you are irreplaceable.” Then I thought: Man... But I kept that on my mind... I had to prove to Disney that I was irreplaceable.” (Stich)

Until the end of his program Stich managed to prove that he was irreplaceable. One day, when he was warming up before work, he saw a poster notifying about an audition for a new temporary show, at the Hollywood Studios theme park. Stich believed that this could be his chance to stay longer at Disney. On this audition he would have to sing, dance and act. He accepted the challenge and applied. At the end he was selected as one of the main characters of the show.

“At first I thought that I had failed. By the end of the audition, they have released me but kept some people to a talk. Then, I thought I was out. I went home so sad... On the next day I was off, so I decided to go to have fun in some park... to get better. Suddenly, on the park back stage I saw the choreographer, who was leading the audition, and she came to talk to me... “Hi Stich! How are you? We have called you this morning but you weren’t home.” Then I said: “I wasn’t... I came early to the park to get happier.” And she went: “Why are you not happy boy? You are on the Show!” I couldn’t believe it... I started to cry desperately. Then she explained to me that the people, who stayed later that day, were the ones selected for the choir. The ones who would play the characters were called.” (Stich)

⁷ A picture showing these graduation ears can be found on appendix, figure 5

Although, Stich's story is an exception. We couldn't find any other alumni that had a chance to stay longer like he did. The ICPs, most against their will, suddenly had to say goodbye to their Disney way of life and "go back to reality".

3.2.3 Reintegration stage:

"All the adversity I've had in my life, all my troubles and obstacles have strengthened me... You may not realize it when it happens, but a kick in the teeth may be the best thing in the world for you." (Disney, 2001, p.106)

The reintegration stage starts with a painful farewell. Having to say goodbye to their "Disney way of life" is definitely not an easy task. Even before leaving, they already knew that they would miss their job, their coworkers, their roommates and friends. As Genie have told us:

"My last day of work was really touching. I used to work at the Kilimanjaro Safari. There, besides working as the safari driver, which was the main task, we used to have other assignments as organizing the guests line, parking their strollers, things like that... On this last day, I was kind of hoarse and they've sent me to do this side jobs. As the day was going to an end, I started to get sad because I thought that I wasn't going to guide the safari one last time... Then, finally someone came to ask me to take over one of the trucks... I was so glad... By that time I would still have time to conduct two tours before my shift was over. Despite my bad voice, the first tour was great... When I got into the platform to pick up the second group, they sent me to do it alone... I really don't know if they did it on purpose or if there wasn't any guests waiting... I just know that this last tour was sensational. It really touched me... I went on the safari route alone. And as I was driving through it, enjoying the view, I started to think of all the people that I had met on the program, what an experience that I had. I was so glad... and at the same time so sad that it was coming to an end." (Genie)

While saying goodbye, the ICPs go through some moving last moments. By the end of the safari route, before parking the truck, Genie went on the gas place for the last time. There he told the pump attendant that it was his last day on the program. The guy asked him to get out of the truck so he could give him a hug. Genie told us that they've hugged and then he took a picture with that guy, which he still fondly keeps. After that he went to the safari cast room, for the last time.

"When my shift was over, after fueling the truck, I went to the safari cast room... Everybody was gathered there, and I went to say goodbye to each one of them... Then, one of the girls wished me a good life. At that time I thought it weird... But she had said these kind goodbyes before, thus she knew better than me. I hadn't realized it yet, but those people, that had become my friends, belong to universes quite

different than mine. That was probably the last time I would get together with then.”
(Genie)

Watching Wishes for the last time was a remarkable event for all of our informants⁸. As we have mentioned before Wishes is a musical fireworks show that happens on the Cinderella Castle surrounds. The show is “hosted” by Jiminy Cricket and the Blue Fairy, and revolves around the wishes of famous Disney characters. Summing up, the show carries the message that we should believe and live, always “trying to reach our dreams”. The Wishes message is very touching for lot of ICPs, who are young, full of plans, and were far away from their home living one of their dreams. Thus, it has become a tradition among ICPs to gather on Magic Kingdom on their last night on the program to watch the fireworks show together.

“In 2010, the Disney marketing campaign was “let the memories begin”. And prior to Wishes, just as a pre-show, they used to project on the castle, with background music, pictures taken that day of guests having fun at Disney. I remember on my last day on program... We went to Magic Kingdom, right... When they started the projection of the photos at the castle my eyes filled with tears... And it wasn’t only me... When I looked around all the ICPs were crying... Then, when Wishes started we were already crying!” (Goofy)

A common fact testified by all our informants was the sadness and emptiness they have felt while returning to their home country. As Ariel said:

“It is such a sadness... It is like you are physically in one place, but your thoughts are on another... And you desperately want to go back to Disney.” (Ariel)

This common sad feeling was labeled by ICP alumni community as Post-Disney depression.

“Going back home makes you kind of depressed... There is even an acronym that we use to describe it: PDP, the Post-Disney depression. It is complicated, you know... Suddenly having to readapt to a totally different way of life.”(Goofy)

As explained by Goofy the readaptation is a complicated process. They get used to such an intense routine, full of novelty, new friends. Moreover, they have changed, though most of the things back home remained the same.

“When I came back it seems like everybody that I used to know, my old friends... They were different... weird. I found everybody so boring, you know... Like, they were no longer interesting.” (Stich)

⁸ A picture of some Brazilian ICPs gathered to watch the Wishes fireworks show on their last day on the program can be found on appendix, figure 6.

Just as it happens for the pilgrim, this time spent away from home has turned the ICPs world into a bigger place. They had the chance to analyze their lives from a different perspective, rediscovering and refreshing themselves.

“After the program, my life kind of changed... My focus had changed. When I was a teenager, I used to act. Though, once it was time to apply for University I thought: “Now I have to choose a real career, something serious”. And then, I decided to study in a tourism management school. When I was at the Disney program I realized that, as much as I had avoided it, my life would always lead me to act. So, when I came back, I continued at the tourism school, but I’ve also applied for an acting school. I’ve graduated in both, but as the time went by, I was increasingly working less with tourism and acting more.” (Stich)

Actually, what happened to Stich isn’t unusual among ICP alumni. Usually in Brazil, people have to choose their profession, which career to follow, on their 17th, when is time to apply for universities. Lots of these people are still naïve. They don’t know much about their abilities or preferences. Spending some time abroad definitely opens their minds. Besides, they become aware of what they are capable of. In Donald’s case, the program have changed him so much that when he looked to his old life, on this new person’s shoes it didn’t make sense anymore.

“When I came back I didn’t want to return to law school. I didn’t want to be a Lawyer anymore. I actually didn’t know what to do with my life... It was excruciatingly! Then, one month after returning I received the amazing news that Disney would now allow former cast members to reapply.” (Donald)

Donald did the selection process again and managed to return to the ICP. In fact, since 2009 he has already worked for The Disney Company five times, on three different kinds of programs.

“I am a dreamer! I live my life by that Walt Disney’s quote: If you can dream it, you can do it! I really believe in it... I have faith in my dreams, and I fight for them. (...) I dream of one day work for The Disney Company at some human resource department. I know the walk is long, but I also know that every step I take, the closer I will be.” (Donald)

Donald’s story is kind of peculiar, as we couldn’t find any other ICP alumni who had been on more programs than him. Although, trying to return to work at Disney isn’t rare among ICP

alumni. For instance, half of our informants have been in more than one Disney program, and those who haven't, reported to have felt tempted to reapply.

"I miss it until today. Sometimes I get that feeling of throwing it all away and applying for a Disney program." (Goofy)

For those who have returned, we asked how they felt when they arrived there.

"People usually say they feel as they were coming home, but for me it felt as I had never left." (Ariel)

Regarding the Post-Disney depression, it lasts longer for some than others. Nevertheless, for even those who manage to overcome it, the emotional bond with the Disney Company never fades away. Mickey has said:

"I consider myself a satisfied person. I'm happily married, I have a good job, I am glad with my life! The ICP was a very important and special time of my life... Other than my marriage, it is hard to remember such a remarkable experience that I've lived... I am very thankful... I love The Disney Company, and always will!" (Mickey)

In one way or another, all ICPs alumni we got in touch with have reported that the program was a remarkable and important moment of their lives. As Genie has mentioned, it works as a ritual of passage. Indeed, he believes that while on the program the youngster grows up a lot. They go through adversities and learn to handle things on their own. Moreover they become more confident to envisage their adult life.

Present days...

In order to understand how these Alumni manage to maintain their Disney identity we tried to figure out how they keep its traces on their present lives.

Interestingly, it was observed that most of ICP alumni feel as they were still Cast Members.

"We still feel as part of Disney, right ... The experience is so remarkable, that it feels like it will never leave you! There is this emotional link, bond... I admire so much the Disney Company. And I've helped to build it. I've been part of it. This makes me so happy! We stay connected... as if we were still working there... I believe that we end up turning into a kind of Disney ambassador in Brazil." (Goofy)

Besides believing they are still part of the Disney Company, they have reported that most of the people, who know them, identify them as someone who has worked at Disney, as a "Disney person".

"Of course everybody knows that I've worked at Disney! I am the Disney Girl."(Flik)

"Well, my work colleagues always tease me... They call me Minnie!" (Goofy)

"Everybody knows... People joke that I'm Minnie." (Ariel)

In fact, they've reported to enjoy sharing their Disney stories.

"People usually know that I've worked at Disney. Personally, it is something that I like to share with the people I know. It's an interesting issue, and people usually like to hear about it." (Genie)

"I really like to talk about Disney. It makes me proud to tell people about it... The time I've spent at Disney was the best experience that I've ever had. Surely it was something that made a big difference in my life, you know... I did change a lot as a person... in every sense." (Daisy)

Moreover, that same sense of pride to belong to Disney they used to feel whenever they visited a theme park, they now feel by hearing about the company on the news, by giving tips to friends who are going there or every time they watch a Disney movie.

"I have planned a lot of Disney trips. Every time a relative or a friend decides to travel to Orlando, they come ask me for help. Now, I've created a template that I adapt depending on the person who is going to travel." (Goofy)

"On Christmas, I've watched The Lion King... Every time I watch a classic Disney film I get so emotional." (Daisy)

Actually, this was a question that we have asked to our informants, what was the last Disney movie they've watched. They all seemed pretty up to date. All of them have answered one of the last two animated films released by the Disney Company ("Rack it Half" or "Brave").

Another important aspect of our informant's present life is that they've reported to still have some kind of contact with their Disney friends. In addition, they agreed that this was possible mainly due to internet social networks (Orkut and Facebook). Given that while on Disney, the ICPs get in touch with people from all around the world, it would be almost impossible to stay

in touch for too long without today's internet tools. Furthermore, they've explained that as time passes by it gets harder to stay in touch with the other ICPs. Suddenly their lives are filled with other priorities as job and family, and for some of them this contact becomes restricted to online communication, even with Brazilian alumni.

In contrast, other informants have reported that until today they still meet with some Disney friends once and while. And according to them, every time some ICPs get together they spend hours talking about their Disney experience.

"Whenever I meet my Disney friends it turns into a nostalgic event. After all, we only talk about Disney!" (Goofy)

"It's funny because every time we get together we end up talking about Disney. And when it has an outside person on the group, this person gets totally lost. They can't follow our conversation. Only cast members understand each other." (Daisy)

In fact, we have found out that the Brazilian ICP alumni community has organized some big parties for "Cast Members" only. While on the program, whenever an ICP wants to skip work for doing something else, usually have fun, they end up calling in sick, as an excuse. Thereby they've named their event as the Call Sick Barbecue⁹. And, as advertised by its organizers, the party is brought together so they can remember the "magic".

The Call Sick Barbecue takes place in a farmstead close either to Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte or São Paulo. The guests usually camp at the party site and it lasts an entire weekend. These parties gather different generations of ICPs, from every corner of Brazil. Thus, besides meeting their Disney fellows, our informants have reported that they have made even more Disney friends on these barbecues.

The friendship among alumni from distinct programs is indeed very common. We have acknowledged that many who apply to the program have a friend or a family member who has been on the ICP before. Usually when the youngster returns from the program, they regard those three intense months as the best time of their lives. They remain astonished for quite some time with the experience they have lived, and naturally "advertise" the program for everybody they know.

⁹ A promotional flyer of the 2008's Call Sick Barbecue can be found on appendix, figure 7.

I have found out about the program through my sister. (...) My sister had returned amazed about program, with a lot of new friends. (Genie)

Moreover, there are some alumni who had been on the program more than once, and they end up connecting people from different programs.

In fact, my group of closest friends here from Fortaleza is very funny... One is a friend that I've met on my first program, in 2009. This Girl had a college friend who also worked at Disney with me, when I returned in 2010. There is also this guy who was my roommate in 2010. He met one of the Girls while he was on the program and then, we introduce him to the other, who was an ICP in 2009. And there is a Girl who had just returned from the program with me, that I have also introduced to them. It's crazy you know... We've created a group where everybody was an ICP, though in different programs. And I had made the link between them! (Donald)

Actually, we could observe that the ICP alumni are indeed a bonded group, with their own values and beliefs. As described by Goofy:

"People say that while on the program you go through some kind of brainwashing... But what actually happens is that we come to understand the Disney's values... admire it... These values get printed on us! The same way the guests get delighted, the employees also do!" (Goofy)

Then, we have asked them if they believed that a former Disney Cast member would make a better professional than someone who had never been on the program.

"Well... first, someone who has worked on Disney went through a serious and harsh selection process... and thus, fits on the Disney pattern. Presumably, this person is going to believe and like the Disney's values. More important than the experience of working abroad, it is to absorb their values... The Disney basics! People who believe and act according to the Disney prototype are indeed different... Special! It is not to anyone." (Goofy)

Likewise Goofy, the rest of our informants believed that a former ICP has a tendency to add something more. Although, they all have made it clear that more important than have worked at Disney, is to have learned what they have to offer.

"If I was to hire someone and find out that one of the contestants was a former ICP, I would add another point to his interview: I would want to know more about his Disney's experience. Because there are some alumni that have been there just to have fun, you know... Some people would say: 'O man... It was so good... Lots of parties... I used to go to the parks every day' So, if I start to talk to the contestant and he says that Disney was nice because it is fun; I would definitely not hire that

person. But if I realize that the person has in fact learned... have grown professionally... I would give this person some extra points.” (Stich)

Another point we’ve tried to explore during our interviews was if they had still had possession with the Disney brand. While talking about the program our informants have mentioned about discounts they used to have in Disney stores and that they have brought a lot of Disney stuff from the program. So we have asked them if they still have Disney products either new or from that time. And they have all answered yes.

“I do! And I want more! I love Mickey Mouse. Disney creates some intelligent and charming things to sell. I have this Mickey’s antenna toper in my car. It is very special for me; do you know why? Because when I bought it I didn’t have a car. So I told my husband that I had bought it on the internet to stimulate us to get a car. Now we have a car, and the mickey is there!” (Mickey)

Besides buying things for themselves, they’ve have also reported to give Disney products as presents.

“Last year I have been to New York with my wife, and there I went to a Disney store. There, we have bought some very beautiful Disney ornaments for our Christmas tree as well as some souvenirs for our nephews.” (Genie)

“Nowadays most of the Disney things that I buy are presents, especially for my nephews. My older niece is about eleven years old... She is always asking me: “How is it, to work at Disney?” So I believe that when they see some Disney thing they will remember me.” (Ariel)

Here, we have acknowledged that we could actually classify the program alumni community as a subculture of consumption. By acquiring Disney things, they are telling others who they are and bringing to light their Disney identity.

Regarding the possessions they have brought from the program, they all have reported to keep fondly things like their nametags, traditions handouts, photographs and park guides. Even Flik, who have assumed to not have much affection for his things have kept a lot of stuff.

“I am definitely not a keeper, but I have held everything from my Disney programs. I literally have kept everything... every piece of paper that I have received... I have everything, since the Traditions until the last day.” (Flik)

As we could observe, these program “tokens” are priceless possessions that are indeed part of their extended self.

While talking about Disney products it emerged an interesting term on some of our informants’ discourses: “Disney freak”.

“I already was a Disney freak before working there... Today I am even more!”
(Goofy)

Donald even specified the kind of “Disney freak” he is:

“I am not a Disney freak about the characters, the films... Thought, I am a Disney freak regarding the Disney Company.” (Donald)

At last we have asked them if they have plans to spend some vacations at Disney. Despite some have plans for going there sooner than others, they’ve all reported intention to return to The Walt Disney World Resort.

4. DISCUSSION:

The current study was conducted in order to explore the Disney International College Program role on the development of its participants' self. Grounded on theoretical background settled on section 2, we have assumed that people are endowed with a multiplicity of identities, and the synthesis of these identities was regarded as the self (Sokefeld, 1999; Erikson, 1959). Moreover, as presented on our data analyses, it was possible to observe traces of a "Disney identity" on ICP alumni selves.

These youngsters who join the ICP are in fact in a transitional stage of their lives. They are turning into adults, thus it is a time of making important choices that will probably impact their future lives (Marcia, 1966). At home, most of them have just chosen their future career, and are starting to deal with adulthood responsibilities'. Suddenly they are taken from this context and enter in a reality where Disney takes care of everything. While on the program the ICPs live, work and have fun on the same environment. Disney provides them with a home, friends and more importantly a meaningful job. After all, their work is needed to keep the "magic" alive.

Indeed, the life experience offered by the ICP is unique furthermore, finding a similar environment somewhere else is almost impossible. Taking the pilgrimage perspective (Turner, 1973), the program environmental context, the Walt Disney World Resort, can be actually featured as a sacred precinct, where "fantasy comes to life" (Moore, 1980). This "pilgrimage center" symbolism is clearly observed when someone arrives at the Magic Kingdom theme park and reads this quote, above its entrance: "Here you leave today and enter the world of yesterday, tomorrow, and fantasy". Likewise, its myths are visibly present on the narratives of ICP participants.

As explained earlier, the question of identity troubles many youngsters on the contemporary society (Giddens, 1991). In order to deal with this problem some may resort to "identity capitals" (Schwartz, Côté, et al., 2005), while others might find support on brands (Chaplin & John, 2005). Based on this idea, it was observed that ICP affords its participants with both identification tools, sold by the Disney Company as extremely valuable ones.

Given the harsh selection process, those people approved start to believe that they are truly kind of special, and the distinct feature that they all share in common is to be adjustable to the Disney prototype. Actually, the ICP alumni feel honored to fit the Disney prototype highlighting then, the power of the Disney brand on the contemporary marked-oriented society.

Moreover, the Disney International college program fits easily to the identity capital model, where people utilize resources by means of various (conscious and unconscious) strategies and, over time, the gains made through these efforts can become resources for further exchange (Côté, 2002). These youngsters fight to get a position on the program. In addition, after achieving it, they agree to buy a flight ticket and travel to another country, harm their University term, sometimes downward their life standard and work in a job position they wouldn't accept to perform somewhere else other than Disney. They essentially do it all in order to become a Cast Member.

After being selected by the Disney Company and taken to the "sacred place", the ICP passes through an initiation rite of passage: the Traditions. According to our informants' testimony, it is on "Traditions" that the transition from immanent to actual membership happens. That's when the "mouse ears" seed is planted on their heads. While on the program this seed is strongly nurtured so as to make the "mouse ears" permanent. In fact, intentionally or not, by joining the program the ICP is acquiring the Disney brand to his identity portfolio.

As we have discussed on the theoretical background, choice has taken a leading role on people's lives' direction (Giddens, 1991). These youngsters who join this pilgrimage have chosen to do so and therefore, have to deal with its consequences, either for good or bad. But which are these consequences? And how do they deal with it?

Let's start by the consequences they have aimed while deciding to apply to the ICP. Those looking to enrich their CV, actually do it. They now have lived abroad, and can add the Disney company "stamp" to their curriculum. In addition, they manage to improve their English, practicing it on their daily routine. Moreover, those who were also looking for fun and free pass to enjoy the Walt Disney Resort end up getting it. Thus, in some way, their main expectations are actually met by the program.

Besides, for some participants this program works as rite of passage to adulthood. While on the program they indeed grow up. These youngsters go through adversities and learn to handle things on their own. They earn a sense of responsibility and end up becoming more confident to envisage their adult life.

The program also helps them to develop their social capital. As said by our informants, before, during and after the program they meet a lot of “Disney” people, what certainly expand their social network. They grow a sense of belonging to a sort of community defined by Zygmunt Bauman (2004) as bonded primarily by ideas and principles. Actually, this community has particular standards; in fact, most of them work oriented. And it has also its own culture grounded on dreaming, believing and doing something about it.

Most of the ICPs say that they have lived the fullest while on the program. Some even say that it was the best time of their lives. And this extraordinary experience is all provided by The Disney Company, to whom the alumni community is very grateful. Indeed, they become to praise the Disney Company and brand.

Despite all the good outcomes, the ICP can also leave its participants with some damaging consequences. In fact, we could observe some mental illness names (depression and freak) emerge from their narratives. And these disorders were both associated with Disney.

In accordance with the section 2, we regard our possessions as part of our selves (Belk, 1988). Herein, the notion of possession is broader than just goods, as it includes family, body parts, job and any other thing that we may call mine. Then, an unintentional loss of some meaningful possession might bring people to feel sick and experience a sort of “identity crises” (Pierce, Kostova, & Dirks, 2001).

While on the program, these youngsters have experimented and enjoyed a totally different way of life. Despite of being under Disney control the ICPs regard independence as one of the best things about the program. Indeed, for three months they were free from all the chains that used to constrain them back home. At Disney they have lived close to work and friends, were financially independent, and had only their conscience telling them what to do.

Besides, at Disney, the participants have a “meaningful” job. Actually, a fetishized (attributed with “magical” qualities) job, that can only be performed on the Disney context. During the program, the ICPs feel they are special, contributing for something big and making a difference on others people lives. For these youngsters, leaving Disney implies losing a sense of working purpose and significance. Thus, they end up feeling just as a hero who had lost his “powers”.

In fact, going back to “reality” is not easy for these kids. They are suddenly left “powerless” and trapped on their old chains. They indeed lose priceless things that had become part of their *selves*. As enlightened by Belk and colleagues (1989), the reintegration stage is affected by how much the youngster has changed. Therefore, depending on how confident they already were about themselves before joining the program, the thinner or deeper will be the scar left by the ICP consequentially “identity crises”.

Once the program is over the alumni are required to synthesize their *selves*. The participant will have to find a way of sticking Disney in it as well as keeping a reciprocal relationship with his society and maintaining a feeling of continuity within himself. Moreover, depending on the space the Disney Identity occupies on their *selves*, some end up turning into Disney freaks.

Considered Disney freaks or not, all of our informants have managed to keep their Disney Identity alive. Actually, this was clearly observed in some of their consumption choices. As explained on our literature review, on contemporary society people bring organizing forces to their live through consumption (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Thus, by acquiring Disney products the alumni are telling others and themselves who they are.

Other than just Disney consumers we have observed that former ICPs come to be natural disseminators of the Disney Culture. In fact, it is not surprising that the more ICPs the Disney Company educates, the more they will spread their “pixie dust”¹⁰ around the world.

¹⁰ Tinker Bell’s magic dust (from the animated Walt Disney’s picture Peter Pan).

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research has attempted to contribute to academic discussions concerning self-construction on the contemporary society. It was argued that in most western societies, community-oriented policies were replaced by market-oriented ones. Likewise, lifestyles that used to be production-based are now consumption-based. As a result, organizations and brands have become important roots on people's lives.

We have learned that the working holiday experience plays an important role on its participant's growth. Actually, in prior studies it has been equated to the pilgrimage journey, for long known to impact people's self-construction. Given that, we have decided to explore the Disney college program, a branded working holiday experience, from Victor Turner's (1973) pilgrimage.

It was developed a qualitative case study. The field where our case was embedded proved to be an interesting one, and yet poorly explored. The ICP is indeed full of symbolism. These youngsters are transferred to an alter world and are efficiently convinced that's the place "where magic lives". There, they raise their "Mickey ears" and become world spreaders of the Disney culture.

We have observed the existence of an actual Disney alumni community bonded by principles, ideas and consumption. Even years after leaving the programs people still feel attached to each other and, more importantly, they have kept emotionally linked to the Disney Company. Moreover, we have acknowledged that consumption choices and brands are efficient tools to bond social identities (communities); and these tools are indeed used by the ICP alumni.

Herein we have concluded a pioneer research on the Walt Disney College Program, and it was only considered the Brazilian alumni perspective. However, since The Disney company recruits people worldwide, we encourage future researchers to explore the remains of Disney way of life among ICP alumni from other countries.

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APPENDIX



Figure 1 - Disney property map.



Figure 2 – Examples of Cast Members costumes



Figure 4 – Name tag with the “earning my ears” band.

You Made a Difference!

Recipient Name ARIELLE Perner # _____ Area Junior Level
 Leader's Name MIKE HANSON Leader's Signature [Signature]
 Recognized by MIKE HANSON Date 2/15/16

I recognize you for:

- ☐ Projecting a positive image and energy.
- ☐ Being courteous and respectful to all Guests, including children.
- ☒ Staying in character and playing the part.
- ☒ Going above and beyond.

You demonstrated exemplary service by LEAVING GREAT COMPLIMENTS FOR YOUR GUESTS AND HAVING FUN OF GUEST SCRAPES! YOU ROCK!

Card must be filled out neatly and completely to be eligible for the Great Service Fanatic drawing and notation on record card.
 Top copy: The Great Service Fanatic box at recipient's work location • Bottom copy: The Great Service Fanatic recipient
 Parte superior: Copia para depositar en la caja Great Service Fanatic en su área de trabajo • Parte inferior: Copia para la persona que recibe la tarjeta Great Service Fanatic
 Kapi ki anka at: Mette nian Great Service Fanatic nan kate travay ou • Kapi ki anka at: Fou moun ki ap reservea kat Great Service Fanatic
 Phần đầu bản sao: Thẻ Great Service Fanatic tại nơi làm việc của người nhận • Phần cuối bản sao: Người nhận Great Service Fanatic

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Figure 4 - "The Great Service Fanatic Card"



Figure 5 – ICP's graduation hat.



Figure 6 – Some Brazilians ICPs gathered for their last Wishes firework show.



Figure 7 - Promotional flyer of the 2008's Call Sick Barbecue.