



WPI

Finding Purpose: Backpacking in Panama

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Meet the Team



Katie Strogach

Computer Science &
Mathematical Sciences



Marina Fongeallaz

Biology &
Biotechnology



Bryce McKinley

Robotics Engineering
& Computer Science



Lucas Varano

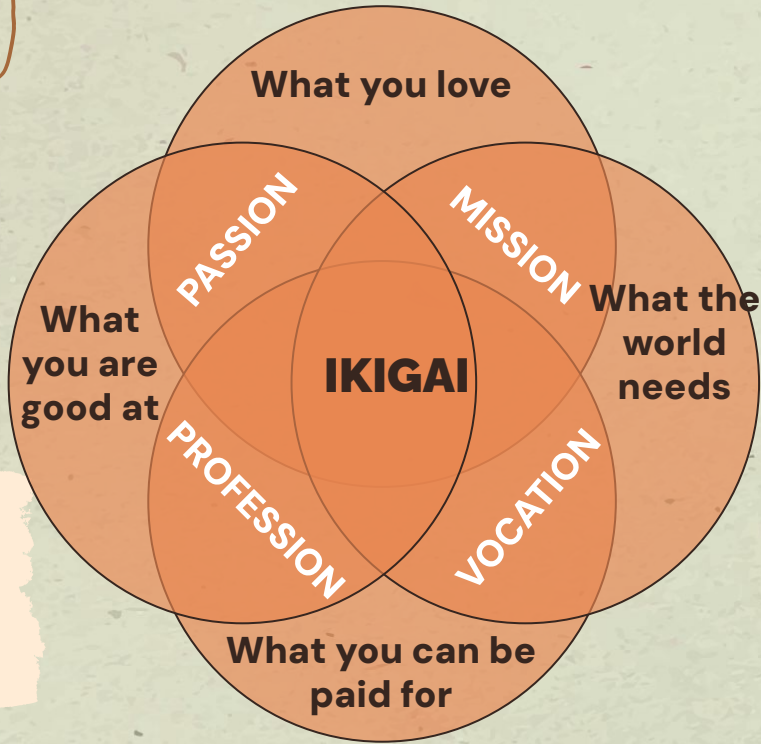
Mechanical Engineering

Societal Norms Limit Ambition and Experimentation

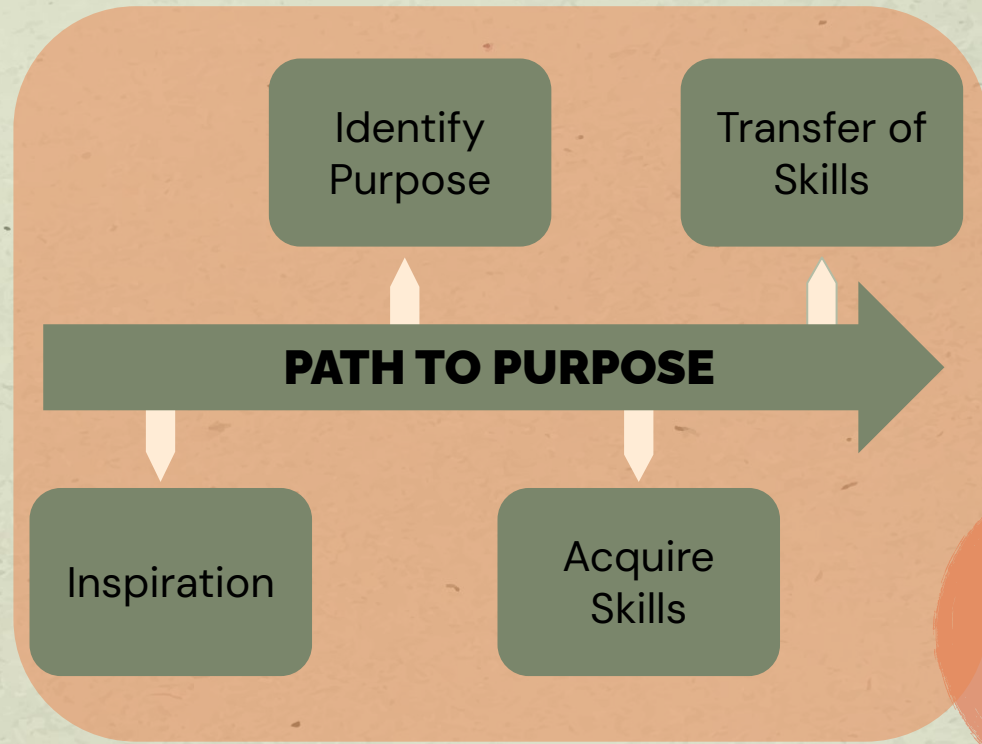


What about purpose?

What is Purpose and How to Find it

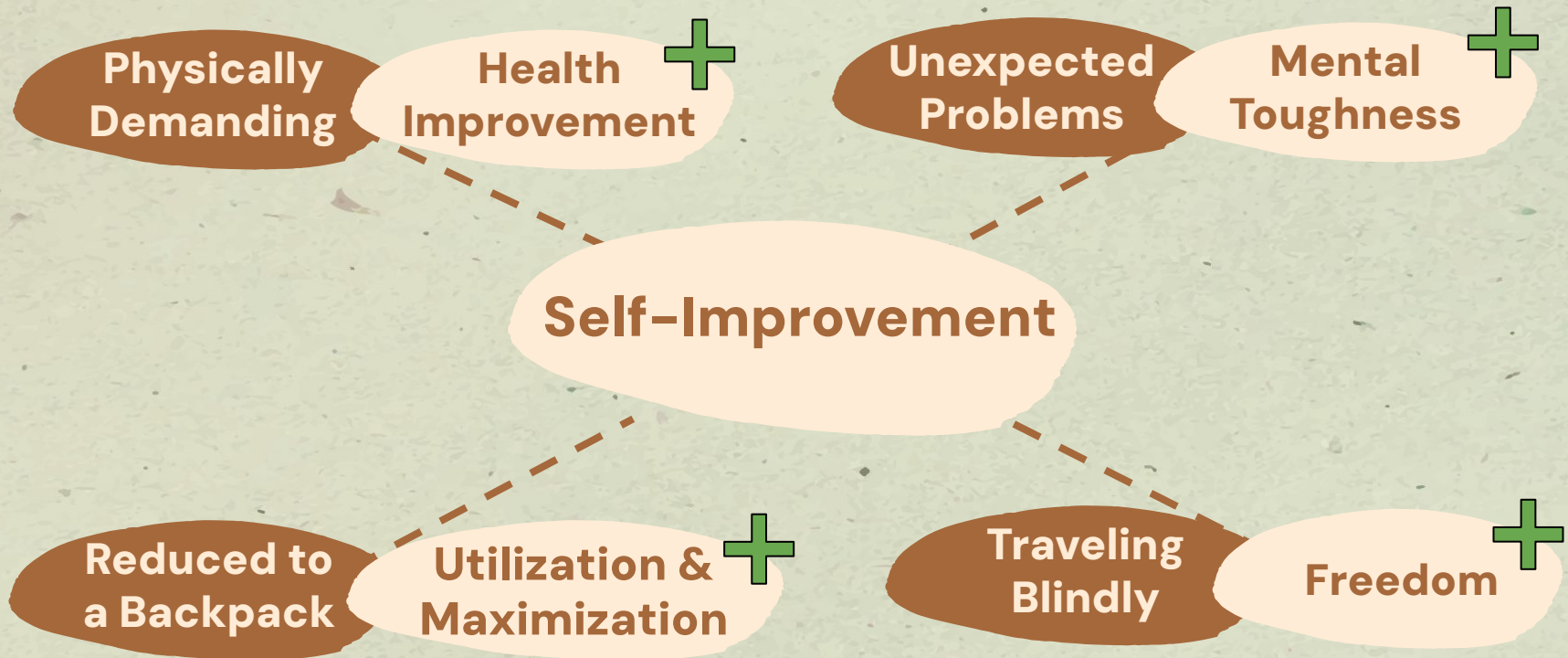


Adapted from (García & Miralles, 2016)



Adapted from (Damon, 2008)

The Challenges and Benefits of Backpacking



Backpacking in Panama

Tourism

~2 million in 2022
Convenient transportation
Tourist attractions

Exploration

Stunning landscapes
Top 25 biodiversity
Rich history

Social

Popular nightlife
Abundance of hostels
Abundance of backpackers



Cover of *Lonely Planet Panama* (St Regis et al., 2022)



Does Backpacking Help to Find Purpose?

Research Strategies



**Archival
Research**



**Interviews &
Surveys**



**Ethnographic
Research**

Backpackers' View on Purpose

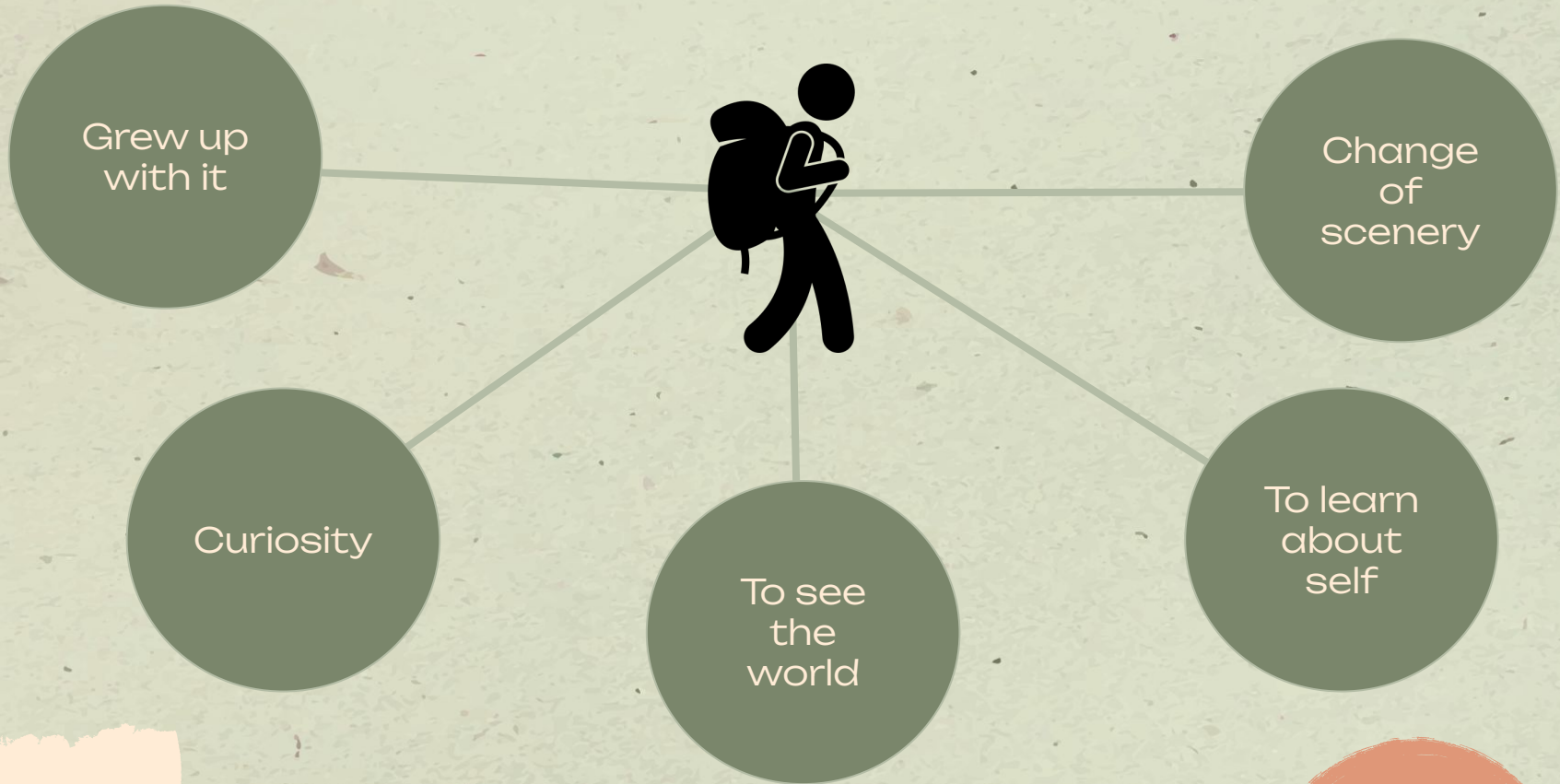
Definition of Purpose

- Brings joy
- Gives back to world/community
- Adds fulfillment to life

Finding Purpose

- Changes through life
- Is purpose necessary for a happy life?
- Self determined vs Predetermined

Why People Backpack



Backpacking Styles



Groups



"I've traveled a lot with [my friend] and it's through our travels that we've become dear friends"



Individual



"[When] you are by yourself, you got time to think of everything... that definitely will make you grow a little"

The Impacts on Local Communities



Main street in Pedasí at 9:30 pm

The Impacts on Personal Growth

General
Self-Efficacy

"It helps you to develop... a kind of go-with-the-flow mentality... you... learn to accept things the way they are"

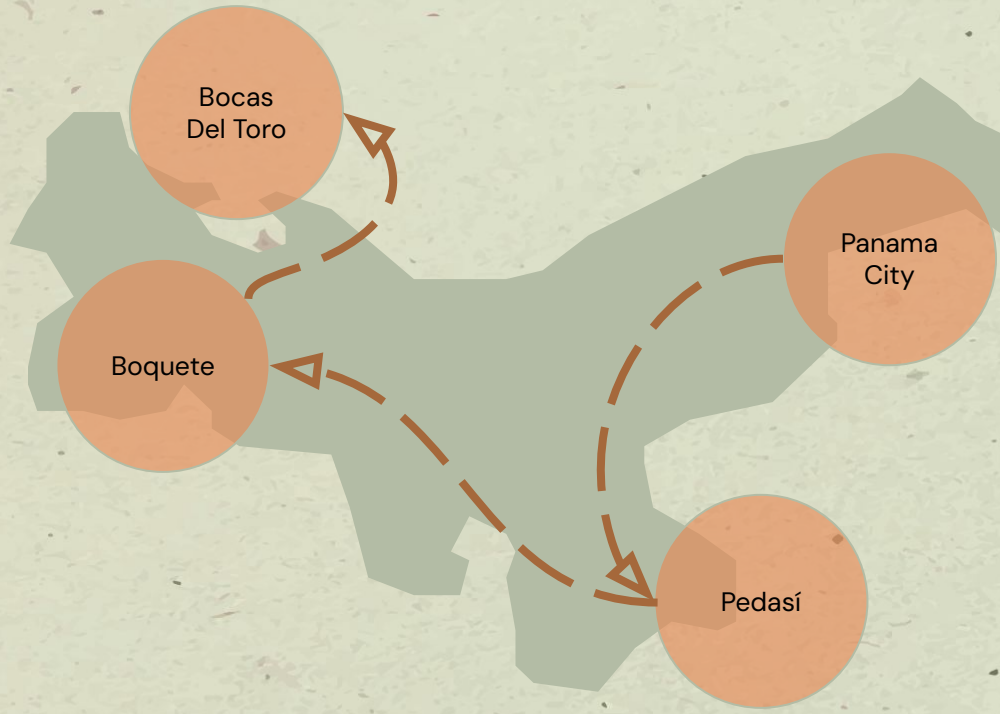
Purpose

"I think backpacking does bring me a sense of fulfillment... I think it is a big part of who I am"

Mental Health

"I definitely feel way more confident... I'm like, okay, I got myself into whatever, I can figure it out"

The Journey



Recommendations

Future projects

- ❖ Expand the range of surveys and interviews
- ❖ Conduct research in new locations
- ❖ Research Impacts of Backpacking/Tourism on Local Communities

Backpackers

- ❖ Prioritize individual style travel
- ❖ Do challenging things!

THANKS!

DOES ANYONE HAVE
ANY QUESTIONS?

Contact us at:
gr-backpackers@wpi.edu

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References

Damon, W. (2008). *The Path to Purpose*. Free Press.

García, H., Miralles, F. (2016). *Ikigai: The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life*. Penguin Books.

St Louis, R., Fallon, S., McCarthy, C. (2022) *Lonely Planet: Panama* (9th edition). Lonely Planet Global Limited