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# Into the wild

*Learning experiences of youth in nature-based activities, Junior Rangers Netherlands*

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I cannot teach anybody anything, I can only make them think.

-Socrates-

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## Summary

This study aims to explore the experiences of youth on learning aspects in nature-based leisure activities. People are getting more concerned about nature conservation as well as youth being involved in nature. Learning is often studied in formal settings, while constructivism considers learning a continuous process, thus every moment is a learning experience. Adolescents are less accounted for in researches that focus on learning, experiences and leisure together with informal nature-based settings. This research is set up to gain more insight in these contexts and study fields focussing on the youth, as the youth themselves indicate they desire more involvement themselves with nature organisations, to learn about nature.

In order to deepen the understanding of this particular setting, three different theories were used to encompass the learning experiences of youth in nature-based leisure activities. Two learning theories have a base in constructivism; which are free-choice learning and environmental learning. Free-choice learning gave the understanding of an informal setting and the meaning of learning in such a setting. Environmental learning brought the insight into programmes that focus on learning about the environment with the goal to create responsible environmental behaviour. The third theory has its base in leisure and describes three types of leisure, casual, serious and project-based leisure and gave possible outcomes of how leisure was experienced by adolescents. None of the found literature focussed or included youth in their studies, these found results and theories were compared with the gathered data to explore whether youth can be compared to earlier studies.

The youth programme Junior Rangers was the focus in this study. Junior Rangers is a programme that focusses on youth and tries to connect them to protected areas close to their homes through offering learning experiences in and about nature. The data was obtained by combining three information sources, the first and leading data was given by adolescents between 12 and 19 years old who are part of the Junior Ranger programme during informal semi-structured interviews. The second source of information were experts who are involved in the programme and thirdly, the researcher herself brought insights from observations within and during the programme as she has been a mentor herself for three years. The results were analysed with the three theory outlines as a framework to categorize the findings.

The main findings of this study can be considered as a fourfold of conclusions. First of all, learning can be experienced by youth in conscious, conscious on hind-sight and subconsciously learning. Adolescents mentioned that learning was important to them for two reasons, their own development as well as for the development and conservation of nature in the future. The effect on their own development is clear to the adolescents as well, there had to be a challenge to grow personally on different aspects such as autonomy, competence and relation. The last conclusion concerning learning experiences of youth in nature-based activities, shows that there are two types of learned aspects noticed by the youth. They mention both learning about processes, like managing parks as well as specific facts. It is concluded that youth experiences learning in nature-based activities, consciously, as enjoyable and useful, although not always that consciously as they might see it themselves. Enough room to develop personally is key to experience learning for fun. With the used theories it shows that adolescents experience learning different from both children and adults, thus a new more encompassing theory that focusses on youth as a separate group would to increase the understanding of both the fields of learning and leisure for youth combined.

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## Acknowledgements

First of all I want to thank all Junior Rangers for being part of the programme. Special thanks go out to the Junior Rangers from the National parks Weerribben-Wieden and Drents-Friese Wold, who were all so excited and happy to help with my research through filling the role of interviewees. Without you guys I couldn't have done this research, your thoughts, stories and comments were not only valuable but also a delight to reread. Furthermore the extra insights of all experts were very welcome, all the interesting ideas and insights that were given helped me forming an extra point of view during this research. Having all the positive reactions to this research, with great interest for the outcomes, from both the youth as well the experts made it clear this research was more than a required thesis to bring my master education to an end. Not to dismiss that the latter was the main reason to start this research, but I am honestly thrilled that it has valuable meaning to others as well.

Furthermore I would like to thank Martijn Duineveld for being my supervisor. He gave me good and enlightening advises when needed. During the coffees and the music of Into the wild by Eddie Vedder, ideas, processes and theories were discussed of which without I would have had a much harder time to get the result that lays here before you. I also like to thank Karin Peters for her critical notes that made me to improve my research further.

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# 1. Introduction

Today people are increasingly concerned about how young people spend their free time, especially in nature or natural settings and outdoor environments (Louv, 2005). Studies from for example Price, Vining and Saunders (2009), show that conservation of nature is of great importance in our future. They stress that conservation problems increasingly threaten us and that people's understanding of these issues is vital. They also point out that 'long-term experience-based programmes' has beneficial outcomes in favour of environmental behaviour (Price et al., 2009). For the society in general, understanding the meaning and importance of nature is a crucial part of trying to achieve a (more) sustainable living environment. Education on this matter has been and still is a focal point for many researchers yet, at the same time it is also acknowledged that there is still a knowledge gap concerning learning experiences (Brody, 2005; Packer, 2006; Chawla & Flanders Cushing, 2007; Price, et al., 2009). This research is set out to gain more knowledge on learning experiences of adolescents during nature-based leisure activities.

Experiences of learning can be fluent and individual like leisure experiences, but can simultaneously be part of the leisure experiences as well (Caldwell & Witt, 2012; Falk, Ballantyne, Packer, Benckendorff, 2012; Packer, 2006). Learning can be understood as a continuous process as well as a product (Falk, 2005; Fosnot & Perry, 1996) although not always that obviously present. At times learning is the main purpose of the time spent and we are aware of this learning (e.g. school, courses). However, learning can also occur during various aspects and activities in life when we are not so much aware of the fact that learning is part of it. Even during our leisure activities, learning can occur and we might even enjoy this learning and see it as leisure because we are actually learning (Packer, 2006). The combination of both fields of study; learning and leisure, lead to many questions on how both are blended into one experienced situation. Nature is one type of background setting of many leisure activities and often linked directly to an informal surrounding, but not always taken in account when discussing both learning and leisure at the same time, especially concerning adolescents. This is the context in which this research is taken place. The goal of this research is to gain better insight into the combination of these four elements; youth, learning, nature and leisure, together.

## 1.1 Problem statement & relevance

While the urgency of involvement of youth in nature is noticed, nature organisations have also noticed a movement of young people who are indicating and urging organisations to invest in learning in and about nature. In October 2013 a conference was held by Europarc Federation to celebrate their 40<sup>th</sup> year of its existence and to discuss current issues. At the same time they held their first Youth conference where involved young people could discuss the theme: what they 'want to see from protected areas and what can they offer' (Europarc, 2013a). The outcome resulted in three dimensions of wishes and pleads: greater youth representation; a network between parks, public and investors; and green education (Europarc, 2013b). This shows that there is youth that actually wants to learn more than they might already do and seem to enjoy the fact that they are

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learning. Learning is both in formal and informal settings present, but compared to the research on formal education settings, where most environmental education research concentrate on, informal settings or programmes outside schools are outnumbered. The desire to be more involved with nature seems to live strongly among youth, thus the importance to know how they experience learning during time spent during activities in nature becomes more and more evident. The importance of keeping those who are interested involved is underlined by Barton (2012) and Louv (2005), who note that the youth is losing its touch with nature more than they ever did before.

The importance of programmes that give young people the opportunity to learn in nature about nature is not researched to the fullest yet. As Kola-Olusanya (2005) describes in his research, the adolescent in the third phase of his or her childhood will be able to comprehend larger (eco) systems and processes, thus creating outdoor activities in nature can be a valuable asset in the development of youth and their attitude towards nature. Barratt Hacking, Barratt and Scott found in there research that the ‘children themselves recognize the importance and value of the natural environment and wildlife for their own enjoyment and well-being’ (2007: 530). Papers are written on the importance of the outdoors for the development of young children, yet during this literature review no papers have been found on youth or adolescents during a programme focused on nature itself. Having a more detailed view on how leisure and learning is experienced by young people, could give a better understanding of the academic fields of leisure and education.

A more comprehensive view of youth and their experience of learning in informal environmental education settings will also have value during governmental decisions on local, national or even international level as support (e.g. governmental support, funds) towards both education and nature fields are frequently debated and reassessed. Organisations that provide environmental education should know how youth experiences learning in and from environmental education programmes in informal settings, in order to implement these insights to the benefit of environmental education. New insights are important for both policy purposes of governments as well as for individual organisations since nature protection and children’s education are areas that are of concern to multiple disciplines.

## 1.2 Scientific objective and research questions

This research aims to explore the field of the experience of learning itself by youth when they are involved in nature based leisure activities, in order to gain better insight in how they experience learning itself. With the exploration of these aspects together this research will bring a better understanding of how learning is experienced in programmes on environmental education.

With previous researches in mind that focus mainly on free-choice learning settings such as museums and zoos, this research focusses on programmes that are developed outside the formal rules of school education. Programmes outside school have less freedom to choose compared to free-choice learning situations just mentioned, but these programmes don’t fit into the formal settings either. Youth environmental groups such as Junior Ranger Network founded by Europarc Federation fit in these outlines. These type of groups are rarely taken into the research scope of previous studies. The choice is made to solely focus on Junior Ranger Network Netherlands in this study for two reasons. Firstly, as this type of group has not been researched yet, the limitation of

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only one nationality out of a multinational network of this youth programme, filters out major culture differences that could affect the outcomes significantly solely due to those differences. Although a more complete view would be obtained when all parks with this programme would be included, the differences due to cultural, educational and other background differences could also create too much variables that have to be taken into account in this exploratory research. The second reason is the limited time that is available to conduct the research; this prevents the researcher to include all participating groups of the entire network.

Although Barratt Hacking et al. (2007) describe the injustice of framing childhood by the means of age, there are different phases in childhood explained by Kola-Olusanya (2005) where the third phase of learning differs substantially from the first two phases. These phases are not bounded by exact ages, but denote the importance of separating and limiting to different levels of development of the child. Due to the necessity to select a workable target group to represent the youth in this research, this particular age group is chosen. As the Junior Rangers in the Netherlands officially uses the age limit of 12 to 18 as criteria to participate in the programme, a selection of age in this research seems appropriate in this study. The age-limit in this research does not imply in any means that there can be an age put on different stages of childhood, but is necessary to select a workable target group.

It is clear there is a need to gain more insight into how these types of nature education programs, which are specifically designed to be tuned in towards the needs of young people, are actually experienced by the participating youth. This research pursues a complete view on learning during leisure especially in understanding leisure experiences and learning experiences of youth during nature-based activities. This problem statement leads to the following main research question:

### **How do youth experience learning aspects of nature-based leisure activities?**

To reach the complete notion of this research question, the following sub-questions were developed:

- What is the content and purpose of the Junior Ranger programme?
- What are the learning aspects of nature-based leisure activities?
- How do youth experience nature-based leisure activities?
- What does the youth expect and hope for when participating in nature-based activities?
- How do youth evaluate the role of learning during leisure activities?

## **1.3 Structure/ Outline of the thesis**

After this introduction of the research, chapter two will elaborate on the literature concerning this subject, where different streams of learning theories are discussed to set a background for the theoretical framework. In chapter three the theoretical framework for this study will be outlined to

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explain the theory used in this research. In chapter four the context of in which this study has been conducted will be illustrated concerning the area as well as the organisation and its structure. Chapter five brings the theory in to practise through setting up the methodology of this research. The results are shown in chapter six, after which in chapter seven these results will be discussed and linked back to the theory used. This follows by the conclusion in chapter eight.

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## 2. Literature review

First different studies will be used to describe the field of the research concerning leisure and learning. After which several learning theories will be outlined to illustrate what different schools are present concerning learning theories and to serve as background to support the theory in the third chapter. This literature review shows what is already researched in several research settings and discusses several learning theories.

Leisure is a phenomenon that has been around for centuries while the importance of leisure was undervalued for a long time. Leisure was in earlier centuries mainly to recuperate from the long working days in the time of the industrial revolution during the 18<sup>th</sup> and later the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but was compromised to facilitate the economic growth in these centuries (Voth, 1998). For a long time leisure and tourism activities were seen as luxury goods but these activities have found their way into our daily lives. Nowadays, people see leisure not only as time to recharge or relax (Kleiber, 2000), but as a way to actively pass time or to seek enrichment of our inner selves or even pursue a career in certain leisure activities (e.g. tennis, volunteer guide) (Stebbins, 1982; Van Winkle & Lagay, 2012). Along with the normalization of having leisure time in our daily lives, people may not always realize the importance of free time and could underestimate the meaning of it and its valuable experiences. There are three spheres that fill our lives; work, personal obligations (e.g. grocery shopping, doing laundry) and leisure (Stebbins, 2000). Each one of these aspects is deemed essential for our lives, in which the level of importance of leisure differs per person.

Activities that for one person results in recuperation and relaxation can have a completely different effect on another person. Likewise recuperation, relaxation and other goals can be reached through a variety of activities, while some people find their relaxation through relatively physically passive activities (e.g. watching television, reading a book), others find it in rather active pastime (e.g. playing sports, painting, playing guitar, visiting museums). Leisure experience and how people perceive the activities that are undertaken, gives an insight in how people use leisure to achieve what they, perhaps subconsciously, seek. Van Winkle and Lagay (2012: 342) point out that 'experiences are considered diverse and subject to varying interpretations' and state that experiences are considered multi-sensory. These findings indicate that the way activities are experienced depends on many factors and even then may be differently interpreted by a person who has been in the same place at the same time as others have been. Even obligations can be part of the leisure experience (Stebbins, 2000) and it is often unclear where the line is drawn, as it highly depends on one's attitude towards the particular activity.

When research is conducted on learning that involves children or young people, the focus mainly lies on formal learning settings as Rickinson (2001) also noted in his review. Chawla and Flanders Cushing (2007) note that often organisations (like environmental groups), provide meaningful experiences. In the same research they mention that most models concerning environmental education are, although based on enormous samples of researches, based on adults whereas children and youth are (often) excluded in these theories, even though they are an important group to consider. According to Barratt Hacking et al. different researches show that 'children hold particular perspectives, knowledge and understandings of the environment and they view and engage with environments in different ways to adults' (2007: 530).

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Research concerning learning experiences are focussed on free-choice learning settings such as museums, aquariums or zoos (Packer, 2006; Price et al, 2009) or learning during leisure (Falk et al., 2012), while others search to clarify youth perceptions and experiences without explicitly including the experience of learning itself (Barton, 2012). Ballantyne and Packer (2005) point out that it is vital for the success of environmental education to realize that it involves a process of lifelong learning. Many of the previously mentioned researches, note the lifelong learning process and they are aware of its potential when formal and informal learning are both used to strengthen environmental learning. Van Winkle and Lagay (2012) did look into the experience of learning, but the emphasis of their study is found in tourism and only included adult respondents between the age of 21 and 63 years. Although all this research touches upon the same field, none seem to encompass all aspects together. To my knowledge there is almost no specific research done on youth participating in leisure activities with the focus on their perception of learning aspects that are merged into the programmes, compared to other age-groups. Researching this specific area hopefully will contribute to narrowing the gap in both the learning and leisure field.

The second part of the literature review is focussed on several schools of learning theories that are found in the academic field. It is acknowledged that many more learning theories could have been part of this literature review although not included. Reviewing all possible schools on learning theories, developed from the beginning when people started to wonder how people perceive and learn certain elements in life, would surpass the goal of this study to focus on a particular situation. This is not relevant at this stage of this exploratory research. Within the reviewed learning schools several theories are discussed subsequently behaviourism, the cognitivist view, constructivism and also several humanism viewpoints.

Behaviourist theories rooted most of the ideas on the notion of Stimulus-Response theory like Skinner (1963). Behaviourism was a reaction to structuralism, which based its ideas on structures that would determine how and what people think and perceive, and thriving in the beginning of the 20th century. Learning would occur through positive and negative reinforcement. Although most behaviourism theories could explain some of the behaviour displayed by human beings, many failed to clarify more complex processes of the human mind (Bargh & Ferguson, 2000). While Skinner (1963) acknowledged this but did not find a way to explain the consciousness of the mind, others would just ignore the fact that such inner-interaction existed.

In the 50's and 60's new theories became more popular such as cognitive learning theories as Piaget described in his Stage Theory of Cognitive Development (Bandura, 1977), with which he aligned development and learning with stages based on stages of the child and development through imitation (ibid.) and Fischer (1980) who focussed mainly on skill development. Fischer builds upon Piaget's work to implement skill as well as development. Bandura is also very much known for his social learning theory, which explains learning as a social event and cannot happen without the social interaction to verify learned aspects (Bandura, 1977). He also recognised that not only behaviour and the external environment were factors of ones behavioural outcome, but also the psyche of the person him- or herself, as compared to behaviourism thought of humans to be all the same, Bandura figured the persons self was a third influence to the outcome of the seen behaviour. Bandura (1977) acknowledged persons are interpreting new experiences individually and are thus a variable that can change the outcome.

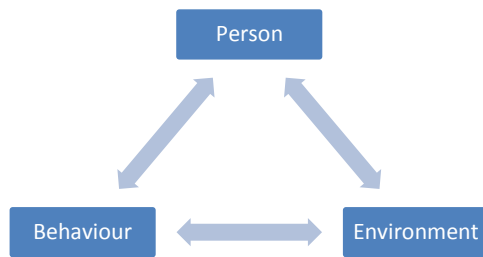


Figure 1. Social learning view of interaction (Bandura, 1977).

Humanism has also been a strong movement during the 20<sup>th</sup> century; Maslow played a substantial role in the development of this movement. Maslow brought with his theory of motivation the notion of the hierarchy of needs; psychological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs and lastly the need for self-actualisation (Maslow, 1943). The most basic needs such as food and sleep would be at the bottom of the pyramid and the highest level would be the self-actualisation of one-self in means of e.g. creativity and morality (Maslow, 1943). Although the hierarchy is based on importance from high to low Maslow (1943) acknowledges that not every individual will perceive the exact same order of needs according to what is most important to them.

The Constructivism paradigm was also progressing in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with large influences of Vygotsky's Social Development theory. In this theory he explained development to be a social encounter where development would not be possible, if the social element was left out. He had three notions of social development: One has to be more knowledgeable than the learner; development occurs in two phases, first learning appears between people and secondly within the individual; and the zone of proximal development in which the levels of actual and potential development are distinguished (Vygotsky, 1978). Fosnot and Perry (1996) described constructivism as based on the viewpoint that people cannot objectively see the world as they have already build a personal perception of what the 'world' would be. This might be a different perception of the world as their neighbour would see the same world.

Lifelong learning is based on the same notion as constructivism; learning never stops and it involves both formal and non-formal learning settings (Watson, 2003). Delors (1996, in Watson 2003) mentioned four 'pillars' that would entail a learning society; learning to: do, be, know and live together respectively. Although lifelong learning means learning for life in essence, some also understand it to be actively pursued in courses or paid leave from work in order to educate oneself. Thus the levels of lifelong learning vary from the acknowledgement that one never stops learning to self-funded, self-motivated learning.

These different theories give a sense of how learning is viewed over the years and how different movements believe the human mind works and is teaching itself and others. As mentioned in the beginning of this section, this literature review certainly does not cover all ideas and theories in the world concerning learning and leisure, but those that are elaborated serve as a background to this research to encompass the field of this study and deepen the understanding of the illustrated situation at hand.

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### 3. Theoretical framework

The goal of this research is to gain a more complete view on how youth experiences learning in nature-based settings. As mentioned in the scientific objective, most research focus on free-choice learning when considering both leisure and learning. This chapter will provide insight into various theories concerning learning, learning experience, leisure and leisure experiences. First, learning will be explained through constructivism and free-choice learning, with a further elaboration on how certain theory-aspects provide a solid base to explain learning experiences. In the last section of the paragraph environmental learning and experiences combined with leisure are explained, followed by a description of different leisure types in the second paragraph. Following the different types of leisure and what leisure means to people, after which it will be elaborated how leisure in general is experienced through leisure types. In paragraph 3.3 a theoretical framework will be provided where these theories will be merged together to provide a solid base for this research.

#### 3.1 Learning theories

The constructivism theory was already earlier shortly described in the literature review, and will be further explained in this chapter since it is the base of most of the learning theories that are applicable to learning outside formal settings and concerning or situated in and around nature. Free-choice learning is then elaborated followed by the phenomenon of environmental learning.

##### 3.1.1 Constructivism

Constructivism is based on the principle that learning is a complex process where the learner constantly changes the perception of understood phenomena into new ones (Fosnot & Perry, 1996). One builds upon his or her previous constructed reality in his or her own way, or as Cooper described it in 1993: 'constructivists view reality as personally constructed, and state that personal experiences determine reality, and not the other way around' (1993: 16). This construction process is far from linear as each individual processes and (re)construct their own experiences and findings into a new readjusted construction. No person will develop the same construction as the old building blocks of one's constructed reality are already different from that of another person. The perception and experience leading to revise one's 'reality' then also contribute to unique constructions.

These unique constructions call for a common understanding as we seek to generalize these constructions. According to Fosnot and Perry (1996) the symbols (e.g. Naming an object 'a teapot'), that we define because of the search for generalization, can be expressed through different mediums (e.g. language, drawings) which can be perceived differently by every individual. Although every individual has his or her own perception of the symbol or the medium, we are still able to understand what another person means, because the symbol is agreed upon in the cultural setting. Fosnot & Perry (1996) described this interaction in a model (*figure 1*), where the back and forth play gives a clear understanding of the way how everything is interlinked. Through our experiences people can give these constructions meaning with symbols, although every person gives different meanings to certain aspects or experiences. We use those symbols through language, stories, metaphors and



models to explain them to each other and therefore we can understand each other's meanings (Fosnot & Perry, 1996). To ensure that individual notions correspond with other people's constructions we try to synchronise our meanings, but we cannot just copy one's construction into our own personal construction, thus we align our perspectives with those of others and construct, as Fosnot and Perry (1996) call them, 'taken-as-shared' meanings.

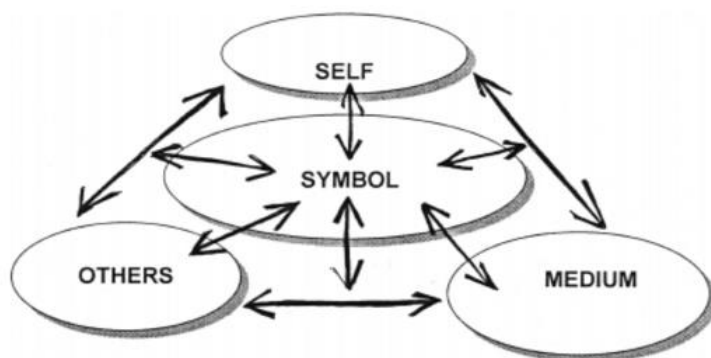


Figure 2. Constructivist learning model (Fosnot & Perry, 1996).

In addition, Cooper explains that learning according to a constructivist is 'problem solving based on personal discovery' (1993: 17). According to him this learning is intrinsically motivated where the learner is in need of 'a responsive environment in which consideration has been given to the learner's individual style' (Cooper, 1993: 17). In constructivism the knowledge that is gathered and (re)constructed has its base in experiences that when encountered and processed helps to rebuild old constructions into the new 'reality'. As Von Glasersfeld illustrates in Fosnot:

'Knowledge, then, could be treated not as a more or less accurate representation of external things, situations, and events, but rather as a mapping of actions and conceptual operations that had proven viable in the knowing subject's experience.' (Von Glasersfeld in Fosnot, 2005: 2)

Cooper (1993) confirms this with his statement that constructivism moved the focus of an external to an internal view concerning learning. When people reflect on (new) representations, meanings and experiences this process itself might bring new insights or 'constructions' and form new representations, experiences and meanings (Fosnot & Perry, 1996). With the notion that this process is constantly repeated, the core idea of constructivism is complete. Reality is considered the 'experiences of the knower' (Cooper, 1993: 16). Fosnot seems to comprise the definition of constructivism in one sentence:

'Learning from this [constructivist] perspective is viewed as a self-regulatory process of struggling with the conflict between existing personal models of the world and discrepant new insights, constructing new representations and models of reality as a human meaning-making venture with culturally developed tools and symbols, and further negotiating such meaning through cooperative social activity, discourse and debate in communities of

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practice.’ (Fosnot, 2005: preface, between brackets inserted by author)

According to constructivism experiences are the key to learning. Every experience leads to learning, whether it is in formal or non-formal settings. Constructivism believes learning never ends and is a continuous process throughout one’s life. This notion is very important in the context of this study, the idea of continuous learning creates the base for conscious learning as well as subconscious learning in settings such as depicted in this situation of nature-based activities in programmes for youth.

### 3.1.2 Free-choice learning

Free-choice learning is based on the idea that people learn constantly (as just elaborated through the use of the constructivist theory) while at the same time the learner is in control of what he or she learns (Falk, 2005). It is a way to describe and explain the ‘learning’ that happens outside formal learning settings, such as schools and courses. Now non-formal settings are also considered to be important places to learn beside the traditional formal settings (Falk et al., 2012). Often free-choice learning is connected to the fact that learning is considered to be fun and intrinsically motivated (Falk et al., 2012; Packer, 2006). Falk et al. have set out several features of learning; they consider it to be a ‘life-long and life-wide process’ (2012: 913) while learning is both a product and at the same time a process as well. According to this research, the learning process and outcome are highly individual and dependent on the context it occurs in. Furthermore Falk et al. (2012) note it is a cumulative process and a ‘process of constructing meaning’, lastly they argue learning is an aspect that can be fun as well (Falk et al., 2012: 914). As mentioned in chapter two, Kola-Olusanya (2005) points out several settings where informal learning settings can occur such as: museums, zoos, nature centres, in parks and wilderness and finally at home with family. Ballantyne and Packer (2005) add next to ‘encounters in nature’, the settings of sustainable tourism and school field trips. In the same research they (ibid.) also point out exhibitions settings to the list of informal learning settings which fits into the scenery of museums mentioned before by Kola-Olusanya (2005). In these settings no one is telling you what to learn, but efforts are (sometimes) made to provide the opportunity to learn. The outcome of what is actually learned cannot be predicted because the process is unique to each individual (Ballantyne & Packer, 2005). Therefore the intended learning aspects might be what educators want to bring to the attention of the learners, but not what the learners pick up from the environment as the educators intended (Falk, 2005). Most likely, some of the intended aspects will be registered, but no one can tell how much is actually taken in and used to rearrange one’s perception to incorporate the newly found information. The setting of this research hold this notion as well, there is no knowing how or what is learned by youth in these programmes with leisure activities.

As described above free-choice learning is free-choice by perception. Falk (2005) argues what might be perceived as freely chosen activity or learning situation, could be seen as compulsory to another and thus highly depending on the context. Falk et al. (2012) emphasize that learning in a free-choice setting should be seen as having sufficient amount of choices on how people learn, but how much choice is reasonable, depends per individual as well as to the actual setting and context. Falk also suggests that people are most likely to participate in free-choice learning to ‘satisfy a personal sense of identity, to create a sense of value within the world and to fulfil personal

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intellectual and emotional needs' (2005: 266). Free-choice learning is based upon the fact that learning is an on-going process that never stops; it is a cumulative process that is constantly modified. This constant learning will be different for all individuals. The experience concerning learning during a certain leisure activity is important to the actual learning.

All nature-based settings such as wildlife parks, protected areas and other encounters with nature (with the exception of nature centre settings) are completely different in setting from other places that have been considered as free-choice learning settings such as mentioned above (e.g. museums, school field trips, exhibitions and museums) (Ballantyne & Packer, 2005; Kola-Olusanya, 2005). Based on how the nature-based settings are situated they can form a category within possible free-choice settings on their own. Although mostly based on centre-settings, the research of Packer in 2006 on educational leisure experiences gives an elaborative and clear view on how people experienced learning in several settings (Aquarium, museum, art gallery, wildlife centre, historic site, National Park guide walk). He came up with five statements derived from his research (Packer, 2006: 340, between brackets inserted by author):

1. 'Learning for fun encompasses a mixture of discovery, exploration, mental stimulation and excitement.
2. The majority of visitors to educational leisure settings consider learning to be, more than anything else, enjoyable.
3. Although most visitors don't come with a deliberate intention to learn, they do seek, or are unconsciously drawn into, an experience that incorporates learning.
4. Visitors identify four conditions that together are conducive to the learning for fun experience' [sense of discovery or fascination; appeal to multiple senses; appearance of effortlessness; availability of choice]
5. Visitors value learning for fun because it is a potentially transformative experience.'

These observations by Packer (2006) make clear that learning can be considered to be fun in these types of settings. This is also mentioned by Van Winkle and Lagay (2012) as they note in their research: 'learning experiences are often characterised as entertaining, fun, enjoyable, multi-sensory, fascinating, effortless and involve discovery and freedom of choice' (2012: 342). In their research they concluded that 'the role of exploration and contrast in tourism learning experiences expressed by study participants could be seen as experiencing novelty which is a factor that contributes to mindfulness: an openness to new information.' (ibid, 2012: 351). This mindfulness gives people the opening to facilitate the experiences 'learning' can give in their own unique individual way. Falk et al. describe the complex process that happens during learning and they emphasize that 'it is rarely linear and is almost always highly idiosyncratic [individual]. Learning is strongly influenced by the inside world of our past experiences, but equally by the outside world' (ibid., 2012: 915, brackets inserted by author). This 'inside world' aligns with Packer's (2006) statement that the need or drive to learn needs to come from within, or which he describes as 'intrinsic motivation', in order to have the experience of free-choice learning. The second part of Falk et al. (2012) concerning 'the outside world', confirms the argument of the importance of the setting in which experiences are occurring. Another point is made by Kola-Olusanya, concerning motivation, as he shows that during the early childhood phase, one has an 'innate drive to explore and discover' (2005: 302), this in later life will be the base of free-choice learning skills. He continues with explaining the middle stage of childhood developmental stage when the physical area in which one learns stretches more and more beyond

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the home base and gives more opportunities to develop and experience free-choice learning skills. This stage will eventually progress into the final stage where adolescents get to the age where they develop concepts such as (eco)systems and large processes that are involved in e.g. stewardship and environmental care and conservation issues (Kola-Olusanya, 2005).

Free-choice learning sets learning in the light of being fun and a possible way of passing your time in a pleasant way. With all the elements of free-choice learning in mind this research will focus on the effects and experiences formed during nature-based activities which are situated in informal settings. The setting of youth groups that voluntarily participates in several activities in an informal setting such as the outdoors, fit into the range of settings depicted by the free-choice learning theory.

### 3.1.3 Environmental learning

Environmental learning is often linked to the free-choice learning approach since it has many similarities on how the process of learning is viewed. Falk (2005) believes environmental education itself is best seen as an approach more than a discipline, which could give it a conceptual frame as how people see themselves in relation to both the biological and physical world. According to Barratt Hacking et al. environmental learning is part of the development of the 'individual's environmental knowledge, attitudes and behaviour, and (...) individual's skills and sense of identity' (2007: 535). Chawla and Flanders Cushing (2007) describe the objectives of environmental education should be seen as active involvement, to solve environmental problems and raise awareness, knowledge, skills and concern for the environment. Environmental learning is inextricably connected to personal development in general (ibid.). In their study, Chawla and Flanders Cushing showed results of several studies, where respondents believed childhood experiences and role models are essential in forming environmental behaviour later in life. These experiences are even considered to be key experiences to those who are interested in nature (ibid.). The argument concerning development is supported by Caldwell and Witt, they conclude that 'leisure and recreation context have the potential to be important contexts for adolescent development' (2011: 24). They argue that several conditions or characteristics make leisure and recreation important and valuable time for development. Seven conditions or characteristics have surfaced from their study (Caldwell & Witt, 2011):

- Autonomy development and self-determination;
- intrinsic and identified motivation, initiative and goal setting;
- achievement and competence;
- identity;
- civic engagement, community connections, and developing a moral compass;
- social skills and social connections;
- emotional response to leisure.

Price et al. (2009) conducted a full study on intrinsic and extrinsic rewards on young children (5-12 years) and they discovered that intrinsic rewards are needed to have a strong and deep motivation to result in long-term behaviour change, while extrinsic rewards can add extra motivation but is not able to motivate the children as well as intrinsic rewards do. The best results are found when the

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motivation comes from within. What should be taken in account is that their study was focussed on young children and their development is in a different stage compared to adolescents. Adolescents are considered to be almost young adults and in this phase huge changes are still happening in terms of their perspectives and perceptions due to the fast development that occurs during the final stage of childhood (Kola-Olusanya, 2005). In their research Chawla and Flanders Cushing (2007) note that parental activeness or approval and encouragement will increase the chance of children to participate in such activities as well and parents and family members are even considered critical role models. Peers or role models can help build confidence by acknowledging achievements, successes and encouragements and reassurance (ibid.). This knowledge on youth development indicates that leisure combined with nature-focussed activities will nurture the sense of responsibility and stewardship and will contribute to the interest and engagement with nature.

As mentioned in the introduction, programs that focus on environmental learning were foremost developed in formal settings such as school environments. These programmes outside the restricted setting environmental education programs with a continuous and long-term character, are the most effective compared to short-term programs such as camps (Chawla & Flanders Cushing, 2007; Eagles & Demare, 1999; Price et al., 2009). It is agreed that to ensure responsible environmental behaviour, the developmental ages of children and youth is the most beneficial time to develop environmental consciousness (Barratt Hacking et al., 2007; Caldwell & Witt, 2011; Chawla & Flanders Cushing, 2007; Eagles & Demare, 1999; Rickinson, 2001). Dillon (2003) raised the argument on the lack of learning theories being taken in consideration in many empirical research studies. As he pointed out that doing so, it would give a fuller perspective of how environmental learning connects with 'regular science education' and the studies would be more generalizable and comparable with one another. From another perspective, experiences solely based on learning would give a distorted impression. Different from formal situations, informal settings allow the learning situation to be interpreted as quality time in leisure style. Therefore it is needed to also include learning experiences from a leisure point of view. In their research Van Winkle and Lagay (2012) focussed on learning experiences during holidays and were able to formulate six qualities of the tourism learning experience: contrast; freedom and flexibility; fun and engagement; authentication; reflection and finally exploration.

Concerning the conditions that give better learning opportunities in environmental learning situations, Chawla and Flanders Cushing (2007) make a strong point when discussing developmental possibilities youth should have in order to foster responsible environmental behaviour:

'According to all four [Responsible environmental behaviour; civic action; sense of both individual and collective competence] fields of research, children and youth need to take personal ownership of the issues that they work on, choosing personally significant goals and integrating action for the common good into their sense of identity. They [children and youth] also need opportunities for direct exchanges and gatherings between young people's groups, where they can share similar experiences, action strategies, and success stories, as well as build friendships, can be inspirational and motivating experiences' (Chawla & Flanders Cushing 2007: 448, between brackets inserted by author).

Having a sense of competence is linked to how one perceives him- or herself and what they believe they are capable of. A 'sense of competence' is also described by Price et al. (2009) as a sense of

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pride and a development of self-esteem. Successes in projects could foster these personal aspects. Although the research of Chawla and Flanders Cushing (2007) does not focus on how young people learn their categories will help to identify how the learned aspect is experienced by individuals. These possibilities align with the seven conditions stated by Caldwell and Witt (2011) earlier on. Although not stated as required, it has been mentioned as a strong influence. Falk et al. (2012) add reflective engagement to the list of factors that can have a strong influence on the outcomes.

Although the study of Chawla and Flanders Cushing (2007) is focussed on environmental behaviour instead of perception or experience, it shows the importance of learning and environmental education especially for youth. From their research they derived practical application aspects, which help educators to encourage responsible environmental behaviour among children and youth. The aspects they developed are respectively: role models and mentors; everyday life experiences; participation in organizations; discussion; achieving success; social network; age-appropriate initiatives; development of action skills; personal significance and parent involvement (Chawla & Flanders Cushing, 2007). Having these applications at hand when dealing with the experiences of adolescents will ensure that it is possible to identify what is experienced. This will only be possible when taking aspects from not only the learning point of view, but also experiences of learning and leisure. As stated earlier, Van Winkle and Lagay (2012) focussed their research on the experience of learning from the point of view of the tourist himself, but as stated earlier on they only focussed on 21 years-old and older participants. Though their focus group is different from this current study, the categories derived from their interviews helps interpreting how younger people experience learning in their free time activities. It is possible that age differences can have a substantial role in having certain experiences, especially in a developmental stage of life. In his research Rickinson (2001) remarks, based on the existing evidence concerning environmental education, there are several influences that shape perceptions of youth concerning 'nature' such as socio-economic setting; experiences of nature; age and cognitive development and lastly media. But he also saw that there was a dominant focus on learning outcomes rather than learning experiences. Dillon (2003) noted in that review, there was a gap concerning substantial existing evidence on informal settings. This gap is closing slowly due to research on several informal setting such as museums, zoos nature centres and to a lesser extent, nature parks and programs outside school. The combined insights of development of three elements; youth, environmental learning and different learning experiences during free-time settings (e.g. nature parks, zoos, holidays and museums) gives a strong base to develop a clear framework which encompasses all elements together. In order to minimize the gap, it is important that all three elements are taken in consideration to create a complete understanding on the situation in this study.

### 3.2 Leisure types

In this paragraph different leisure types are described to facilitate a good understanding of how people can view leisure itself. In order to evaluate the experiences of participants on leisure subjects, it is important to be able to distinct different types of leisure. Leisure can be seen by the participants as a way of passing time while others would take that same particular activity very serious. This idea



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of different leisure types can help to clarify how learning is experienced by adolescents in a leisure environment where learning is part of the set up. To know how people could classify their own leisure will help to understand how they experience learning as part of that leisure activity.

Stebbins (1982) stated that the purpose of leisure shifted from recuperation from work to personal development and fulfilment. This shift could mean that casual leisure sometimes is not satisfying the needs people have to fill their free time. According to Stebbins there are three types of leisure distinguishable; the first two fields serious leisure and casual leisure, although depending on one's own perspective (Stebbins, 1982; 1997). The third type concerns project-based leisure (Stebbins, 2005). Serious leisure is described as an activity that someone seeks career in, although practised on different levels, where some training or skills are needed, someone perseveres at, one that will create a unique ethos, an activity someone identifies strongly with and with durable benefits (Stebbins, 1982). Stebbins (ibid.) differentiates nine benefits, 'self-actualisation, self-enrichment, recreation or renewal of self, feelings of accomplishment, enhancement of self-image, self-expression, social interaction and belongingness, lasting physical products of the activity' (1982: 257) and lastly self-gratification. He only contributes the first eight to serious leisure, as were the latter could also be found in casual leisure. Within serious leisure Stebbins (1982) distinguishes three types: amateurism, hobbyists and volunteers, of which all require some training and perseverance on different levels.

Casual leisure was first set aside by Stebbins as the residue of leisure when compared to the serious counterpart of it (Stebbins, 1982), but in 1997 he referred to casual leisure as 'the practice of doing what comes naturally' (Stebbins, 1997: 18) and defined it as a 'immediately, intrinsically rewarding, relatively short-lived pleasurable activity requiring little or no special training to enjoy it' (ibid., 1997: 18) and it is in no means considered residual from this point of view. Casual leisure is a type of leisure in which people seek 'regeneration, social attraction and self-enrichment' (ibid., 1997: 24). To be able to participate in casual leisure activities, compared to serious leisure (Stebbins, 1982), only basic skills and knowledge are needed and is undertaken with the main goal of seeking pleasure and enjoyment (Stebbins, 1997). Stebbins (ibid.) divides casual leisure into six general types (play, relaxation, passive entertainment, active entertainment, sociable conversation and sensory stimulation) that often interact and are intertwined with one another. This explanation and categorisation of casual leisure shows that although casual leisure is simple to participate in, it is not just the non-sense time of leisure, but possibly equally important as serious leisure. While all types of casual leisure are considered 'hedonistic', as in self-indulgent, by Stebbins (ibid.) and will never provide benefits as much as serious leisure does, Kleiber (2000) points out that the importance of relaxation should not be underestimated. Although Stebbins (1997) was very certain of the lack of the importance that serious leisure can generate, he did see the importance of casual leisure on its own; he notes that casual leisure is easy accessible and is at the same time an importance economical generator but differs from mass-tourism. Mass tourism or popular tourism are completely different from casual leisure as these phenomena are due to rapid fashion changes whereas casual leisure seems to hold more steady ground within formed groups (ibid.). The last positive outcome Stebbins (ibid.) subscribes to casual leisure is that it is the main source of serendipity. Casual leisure provides an environment to discover new ideas 'on accident' instead of searching for new revelations which is more common in serious leisure, although 'discovery by serendipity' might occasionally happen in serious leisure it is the only way how casual leisure creates

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new ideas and inventions (ibid.).

As a third, Stebbins added in 2005 the project-based leisure as leisure type. Although derived from his own experience, project-based leisure is described by Stebbins as 'a short-term, moderately complicated, either one-shot or occasional, though infrequent, creative undertaking carried out in free time' (2005: 2), which will provide both personal and social rewards. At some point it could be a serious undertaking but not with the intention of pursuing a career in the particular activity. As said, project-based leisure has not yet been fully researched as a part of leisure, but this newly named type could be helpful distinguishing non-career intended leisure from career seeking leisure and simple relaxation. Stebbins (2005) remarks that these three leisure types might be, and probably are, not the complete spectrum of leisure and its types. The three types explained here, can be helpful to categorize how participants view their own leisure; as serious careers, mainly as relaxation time or possibly as a temporary project.



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### 3.3 Framework

All experiences in life are learning moments. This research studies the experiences concerning learning in a specific leisure setting. In previous research both learning experiences and leisure experiences have been discussed. The findings of this research form the base of this framework, in order to explore the learning experiences of youth in nature-based activities. The findings of prior studies can be laid next to the findings of this research in order to discover whether the found statements also apply in a situation where adolescents experiences learning in nature-based activities. To have a comprehensive view of what adolescents are experiencing concerning learning, in their free time, one cannot solely rely on one viewpoint. When only leisure experience is taken in consideration, there is no base to explain learning during these undertakings. If only learning is considered in the theory, the setting of a leisure activity is ignored. Thus a theoretical framework that includes multiple aspects that are present in the situation of this study, will give the best understanding.

Free-choice learning has its base in constructivism, without the notion of continuous learning as argued in constructivism, free-choice learning would not be possible to implement. Keeping in mind that the constructivist view teaches that every individual makes his or her own truth, perception and experiences are essential in this research. The same thought can be shared on learning preferences as these are also considered, in the constructivist view, as personally constructed. Constructivism shows that through the use of symbols with taken-as-shared meanings, established in and by society, gives people the ability to still agree upon the same symbols. This view and the freedom of choosing what to learn is particular helpful in understanding environmental learning settings as places like nature parks or guided tours can provide an opportunity to learn. However, the learner still has the possibility of own decision making on how and what they learn. Any motivation that brings them to participate in activities has its influence on how young people experience everything, including learning aspects. The fact that free-choice learning occurs in both formal and informal settings gives it more meaning in leisure situations of different levels, such as casual leisure, serious leisure and possibly project-based leisure. The individual's interpretation of leisure experiences needs to be taken into account when researching learning experiences.

In settings such as organised leisure activities in nature, there is a combination of free choices, where intended learning aspects that are never rigid and where learning opportunities can occur spontaneously. Young people are in a phase of considerable developmental changes and lots of learning occasions. Having learning possibilities in an informal setting can be experienced completely different compared to formal rigid forms. Free-choice learning on a subject such as the environment is something that brings these adolescents to take on these experiences and create them themselves. Giving young people, or anyone for that matter, a chance to grow in their own way, with the handlebars to reach out to, will not only foster cognitive knowledge but also personal growth in many forms.

Free-choice learning connects the two aspects of experience and setting together through free-choice learning insights. Combined with experiences based on leisure and leisure activities, experiences brought by situations in environmental learning settings, free-choice learning sets a strong base to explain learning experiences of adolescents. These three components will not do justice to the experienced learning of youth if one of these aspects is missing. An understanding of

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environmental learning, its settings and conditions to facilitate successful environmental learning, will help to illustrate the setting in which youth experience learning during nature-based activities. Leisure experiences and how they are understood by those who undertake it is another aspect that, together with environmental experiences, helps understanding the mind-set that adolescents experience while spending free time being involved in activities based on nature and environment. Free choice-learning links both situation and mind-set with one commonality, which is learning itself. Both the leisure choice and situation call for a free-choice learning approach. With a combined theoretical framework a much fuller scope is reached on the experiences learning perceived by youth in nature-based activities.

While constructivism serves as the link between the two theories of free-choice learning and environmental learning, leisure experiences and the leisure types brings understanding of the non-formal, chosen leisure setting. Free-choice learning, environmental learning and the notion of continuous learning are essential in this research to explore how youth experiences this learning in a leisure setting such as nature-based activities. By using these theories as a background to compare the specific situation of this study to others, former settings researched, this research sets out to explore whether these found notions also apply for youth as well the specific leisure nature-based activities of this study.

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## 4. Context

The aim of this research is to get a better understanding of learning experiences of adolescents in nature-based activities. In order to have a comprehensive understanding of how youth experiences learning in nature-based activities, a deep insight into these programmes is critical. The first paragraph in this chapter will illustrate shortly what Europarc Federation is, and what their goal is. Then in the second paragraph the Junior Ranger programme is described from the European scale which will be followed up by the Junior Rangers Netherlands where this research has put its focus on. In the fourth and fifth paragraph the two involved parks and their Junior Ranger programme is elaborated on, to give a clear image of the setting and situation this study is taken place.

### 4.1 Europarc Federation

In Europe nature parks and organisations offer programmes especially designed for youth to engage in nature activities all in different concepts all with one commonality, the interest in nature. Junior Rangers is such a programme developed by Europarc Federation. Europarc Federation itself is an organisation that tries to engage and connect different parks in Europe in order to have a vast network of nature parks. Organisations such as Europarc Federation, among many other goals, try to keep the youth involved in nature and try to invest in the younger generation to keep protecting and conserving nature in the future. With the intend to keep the youth interested programmes are set up to increase the involvement of the young people.

Europarc Federation is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that strives for more and better protected areas through improving the management of protected areas, helping with founding new protected areas and putting (existing) areas on the map by showing how vital it is to safeguard these areas and the Europarc Federation also endeavours to aid protected areas with their objectives by trying to 'influence the future development of public policies and programmes, especially with the European Union' (Europarc (a)). Connecting young people with nature is one of the many projects they developed to achieve their goals stated above. The Junior Ranger Network is initiated in 2002, to give the youth of European parks the opportunity to learn about nature parks and to get them more involved in nature conservation. The aim of Europarc is to give the youth the possibility to become the nature park's next generation of ambassadors by guiding them during activities within their own nature park. Each group of Junior Rangers has its home base in one particular protected area in their own country.

### 4.2 Junior Ranger Network

The Junior Ranger Network was initiated in 2002 by Europarc Federation to run as a trial project with different national parks in Europe (Hotham, 2003). The pilot programme 'Junior Rangers: In Action to

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Preserve Europe's Natural and Cultural Heritage' gave Europarc Federation the opportunity to seek how they could gain more involvement from youth concerning the aspects of conservation and protected areas with the intention to create support from as well as the young people as the local communities they live in. The trial ran with four different nature parks in Central and West Europe; Triglav National Park (SI), Krkonoše National Park (CZ), Kampinoski National Park (PL) and Bavarian Forest Nature Park (D) (ibid.). Each park had to implement the initial general programme lines into its own programme of two weeks, each designed by and for the parks themselves. In total the parks involved 60 young people whom participated in the programmes where they developed a relationship with the park; 64.9% of the participants showed interest in doing work for national parks or protected areas in the future (ibid.). The four individual programmes were evaluated and merged into one model concept for Junior Ranger activities, which is recommended in the report of Hotham (ibid.) by Europarc Federation for nature parks to implement youth programmes into their regular programmes.

### Europarc Federation Junior Ranger programme

The Junior Ranger Network is an international collaboration between Europarc and several parks throughout Europe, where they intend to work with young people from the age 12 till 18 who are interested in nature and get them connected to other organisations and parks across Europe.

Junior Rangers come together to do activities, arranged by rangers, that are connected to their own nature park. These activities should be related to the conservation of that park, but also have a cultural as well as social purpose. Every country has basic rules to follow to be allowed into the programme, such as the minimal gatherings per year, the age limit and coordination is done by local rangers. Other than these type of rules they are free to develop the rest of the programme per year as the rangers see fit (Minozzi, 2008). Without compliance to these rules one is not allowed to carry the logo (Figure 3) and call themselves part of the programme. The programmes per country or even per park can be different.



Figure 3. Junior Ranger logo (2014)

There is a handbook (Hotham, 2003) for Junior Ranger programmes which informs the park how they could develop the program. This should be only taken as a recommendation which allows the parks to take those aspects that work best for their situation. The programme in the handbook is not mandatory, therefore it gives freedom to see what fits best, but also triggers a variety of programmes that are being developed which in turn can result in different outcomes on what the youngsters have learned from the programme. This gives each country and even each park its own

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interpretation to the programme as different possibilities as well. Due to cultural or physical differences these recommendations can allow the programme to be as widespread as it is across Europe. Europarc Federation sees to it that once every year an international camp is arranged where all individual parks with a Junior Ranger programme can submit to. Two Junior Rangers of each country are invited to join the international camp. The procedure to get invited depends per country and park, but between the parks, depending on the total amount of applications, has to choose two of their best fitted Junior Rangers to go. Each country or park has its own different application rules, but the international rule is the applicants need to be able to speak sufficiently English in order to communicate with one another. The international camps are hosted by a different park in a different country every year.

### 4.3 Junior Rangers Netherlands

Junior Rangers Netherlands was initiated in 2007 in the Dutch National Park (NP) Weerribben-Wieden. This initiative was set up from within the organisation of IVN (institution of Nature education). It was a trial that proved to be a successful formula in this park to increase the involvement of the youth to this protected area. In 2010 a second National Park, Drents-Friese Wold, started its own Junior Ranger group and this park is also still executing the programme. The location of the parks in the Netherlands can be found in Appendix I. The general programme that both parks have in common is that each of them have around the 10 gatherings of their Junior Rangers, one each month with a winter and a summer break. Each meeting has a different subject that fits within the parks environment. The year seasons are scheduled like school years, thus they start in September and end in July. At the end of one season there is a closure or a summer camp to close of the season. At this camp the youngsters that just completed their first year as aspirant Junior Ranger have to perform a presentation and small test to show they what they learned and did that year. Both 'having a camp' and 'doing a presentation to be able to enter the Junior Ranger programme' are compulsory activities for the park to stay in the Europarc Federation Junior Ranger programme. The aspirants are after they proven their knowledge and commitment to the programme officially Junior Rangers. For application procedure for the international camp in the Netherlands the Junior Rangers have to write a letter in English with their motivation and what they 'want' from the international camp. Then all letters are judged anonymously by an also anonymous team of coordinators, they will select several letters and if necessary draw one or two from the selected letters. Young people are allowed into the programme as they reach 12 years or when they start at high school. The official age limit was set at 18 years old. Both parks follow the same basic line in their programmes but adjusted to the natural environment of the parks themselves, thus each programme is implemented in an individual and unique way, compared to the other parks programme.

National Park Lauwersmeer in the north of the Netherlands has recently started its first group of Junior Rangers in September 2014. The whole programme will finish its first season at the end of June 2014. As this is the first year of the National Park Lauwersmeer, this Junior Ranger programme and its participants is not further included in this research. There are signs that in the near future the Junior Ranger programme might be implemented in other places or protected areas in the Netherlands as well, but as these are still in a developmental stage, no further mentioning of

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these initiatives will be made.

### National Park Weerribben-Wieden

National Park Weerribben-Wieden was the first National Park (NP) in the Netherlands to initiate the programme of Junior Rangers in 2007. The NP is located at the east of the Netherlands in the province of Overijssel and has a typical swamp environment. Large areas of quaking bogs are protected in this area and are of great value to Europe as these bogs are the largest areas around. Peat was and is an essential part of the history and present of the park, as it is a big part of historical culture that formed this land as it is today. Reed is a common plant in these areas along with alder trees. The area is mostly consisting of water or soaked or floating land. On the sign of NP Weerribben-Wieden they have the European Otter as their icon.



Figure 4. NP Weerribben-Wieden (2013)



Figure 5. NP Weerribben-Wieden (2013)

The Junior Ranger group of NP Weerribben-Wieden consists of adolescents that have been enrolled from the first year on till the current season of 2013-2014. All different ages are present from 12 till 21 years. As said before, the official age limit was set at 18 years, but as this NP is also still the trial group for every next season building upon previous years, they decided they eliminated the age-limit for now. NP Weerribben-Wieden has split up their groups into smaller sub-groups due to the age and experience differences that are inevitable in their seventh year of operation. Each year has its own group and activities, but most of the time some groups are melted together for particular activities and at some times all groups attend the same activity.



Figure 6. Logo NP Weerribben-Wieden (2014)



Figure 7. Logo NP Drents-Friese Wold (2014)

### National Park Drents-Friese Wold

National Park Drents-Friese Wold was the second NP to start with the Junior Ranger programme in 2011. Drents-Friese Wold is situated in the north of province of Drenthe and crosses the province-



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boarder to the northern province of Friesland. The area is situated on much drier land, which has areas of drift-sand, moorland and a large amount of woodland, but also has patches of fens. Large areas were production forests, but are slowly brought back to more natural woodlands. Every Dutch NP has a different and characterizing icon placed in its sign, NP Drents-Friese Wold has the Black Woodpecker as symbol.

The Junior Ranger group in Drents-Friese Wold is age-wise ranging from 12 till 16 years old at the moment. The oldest and longest participating group runs now for its third year. As this NP started a couple years later, they are now building up different ages with every new season. Up until now there was no reason found to split this group into different age categories as the group was still manageable concerning age differences and group sizes. Junior Rangers from NP Drents-Friese Wold participate in all activities together as one group, including the aspirants as well as the oldest participants.



Figure 8. NP Drents-Friese Wold (2014)



Figure 9. NP Drents-Friese Wold (2014)

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## 5. Methodology

This study has an exploratory character to find out what young people experience learning in a leisure setting. To ensure that the meanings and thoughts of the adolescents is captured as they are intended by the participants, a qualitative research method is needed (Boeije, 2010). In this chapter the data collection methods will be set out, after which this will be followed by the illustration of the participants that involved in this research. The interview topics and analysis is elaborated, concluding the second paragraph. In the third and last paragraph possible limitations are mentioned.

### 5.1 Data collection methods

The purpose of the collected data is to shed a light on the experiences youth have of learning and learning aspects. The theory framework from the previous chapter is built upon the collected statements made in foregoing researches. The method chosen here is to gain as much usable data for this research in the context of the theory which gives the background to analyse the obtained data of experiences of youth on learning aspects in nature-based activities.

Data collection is done through two methods, observations and semi-structured interviews. Observations are made by the researcher herself both during the research but also recollections from previous events are taken in consideration. The researcher has been involved in the programme as a mentor for almost four years. This inside and up-close information of the youth and the programme is very helpful in this study, as observations are a critical aspect to recognize certain patterns in behaviour that could help explaining experiences even if they are not directly recognized by the participants themselves. Although objectivity is never to be fully obtained in qualitative researches (Boeije, 2010), the researcher made sure that during the interviews the conversation was, though two-sided in structure, steered by the participants. Only when the conversation had the tendency to fall silent, the researcher tried to revive the interview with another question to elaborate the subject. Any observations by the researcher previously and recalled upon during the research are clearly identified to ensure correct interpretations during the study.

Nineteen interviews were held with adolescents and experts who are all involved in the programme during the research. Semi-structured interviews were conducted face to face to ensure a low threshold for the adolescents towards the researcher. Semi-structured interviews give the possibility to have not only pre-designed questions answered, but also spontaneously arising stories to be questioned about (Boeije, 2010). While interviewing young people about their experiences and thoughts of a programme, it can be challenging for them to answer and formulate what they exactly mean or feel about the subject right then and there during interviews. Therefore any story they relate to, is a possibility to let them explain what they encounter, an informal structure encourages them to talk freely about different experiences. The interviews were held in informal places, primarily in their own home environment or, when the previously mentioned location was not possible, at known nature-centres or within the National Park they are related to in the Junior Ranger programme, to foster the sense of informality and to ensure they are in a familiar environment. Most



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of the time parents were not in the same area as the interviewees when the interview was conducted, only at two occasions parent(s) were present in the background. Participants were asked if this was holding them back while answering, if so another place would be found to conduct the interview.

The participants were personally approached to ask whether they wanted to part of the research. To most adolescents (of those available) an introducing email was sent to inform them about the research and the question if they were interested in participating. This email was followed up with a telephone call to ask again and make an appointment. To those whom email address was not available, printed letters were given to take home, before contacting them. Most participants that have been interviewed, are below the legal age of adulthood (18 years), therefore due to ethical reasons the researcher made sure a parents or care-takers consent was given to ensure all purposes of the study were clear to them and they were insured of the anonymity of the participants (Boeije, 2010). This was at the time of the interview also repeated and officially acknowledged by the parents or caretakers through a consent form (Appendix II). The interviews from the youth differed from the interviews of the experts, keeping in mind the different goals the interviews had. Before the interview started the researcher thanked the participants for their decision to be part of the research and shortly explained again what the research was about. Then it was made clear the interview was based on voluntarily basis and the participants were all free to leave at any point in the research when they wished no longer to participate. Much detail was spend on the fact the answers that were given, would be treated anonymously and they were free to say anything. Furthermore the course of the interview was explained. After the explanation the interviewees were asked if it was allowed to record the interview on tape. All interviews were conducted in Dutch to create no language barriers while interviewing adolescents and the experts. At the end of each interview all participants were asked whether there were some subjects missing in the interview, whether they wished to formulate some parts of the interview differently or whether there were some answers that were forgotten during the interview and they might have recalled later on. The length of interviews of the adolescents varied from 30 to 50 minutes, the time used to interview the experts varied from 30 minutes to 1 hour and 40 minutes. After switching of the recorder, thanking for their participation and having a small talk afterwards was part of the process to end the interview in a casual manner. This not only made sure that a pleasant, but also an informal meeting was experienced by the interviewees.

## 5.2 Participants

The aim was to have at least a minimum of 12 adolescents to share their experiences and at least four experts who could give insight from another viewpoint than the adolescents themselves. The youth participants are all between the ages of 12 and 19 years. Although not completely conform the age limit of the Junior Ranger programme, all were involved in the Junior Rangers programme at the time. The selection is selected to be wide-spread across the Junior Rangers of all ages, gender and years of involvement in order to gain as much of a broad and representative spectrum as possible. The choice to also include some Junior Rangers that are above the age limit previously set by Junior Ranger Netherlands, was made by the researcher herself. Extra insights from senior Junior Rangers, who are still part of a programme that they actually have 'out-aged', could be valuable assets to the

research. Choosing multiple parks will give more insight and verification of found data, but brings along other mediators, such as differences in programmes. To limit the chance of cultural background differences between cultures, only Dutch Junior Ranger programmes were used in this study. The aim of the study was to have  $\frac{1}{3}$  to  $\frac{2}{3}$  ratio of respectively NP Drents-Friese Wold and Weerribben-Wieden, due to the larger amount of operational years of the second park with a broader list of participants of all age groups.

In order to have not only the researcher's insights on the programme and the youth, two interviews were conducted with other mentors of Junior Rangers, one from NP Drents-Friese Wold and one from NP Weerribben-Wieden. Also two coordinators of Junior Rangers were interviewed to have deeper insight into the programme, the intentions and their view on the youth. Two interviews were conducted at the homes of the mentor and coordinator, the others were conducted at a working environment (one within the participant's own environment, the second in an arranged, but familiar working place).

In the end 19 interviews were conducted. Fifteen interviews with adolescents (table 1) and four interviews with experts (table 2) from both parks all of various ages, gender and membership years. All participants were very eager to help and mentioned not feeling any restrictions in telling how they felt or what they really thought. The final distribution of the parks was 11 interviewees for NP Weerribben-Wieden and 4 for NP Drents-Friese Wold (a ratio of 73 % to 27 %). The distribution of gender was 47%-53%, for respectively male-female, and only the age group of 16 year old participants is slightly more represented compared to every other age compared individually and the ages 13 and 14 are both represented once. In order to keep all participants anonymous but recognizable within the research, all were given pseudonyms. These fictitious names follow the participants' ages going along an alphabetical order as the age progresses.

Table 1: Participants list youth

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Park	Membership years
Anna	12	Female	Weerribben-Wieden	1
Bibi	12	Female	Drents-Friese Wold	1
Chris	13	Male	Drents-Friese Wold	2
David	14	Male	Weerribben-Wieden	3
Emily	15	Female	Weerribben-Wieden	3
Fay	15	Female	Drents-Friese Wold	3
Glenn	16	Male	Weerribben-Wieden	6
Harry	16	Male	Drents-Friese Wold	3
Ivan	16	Male	Weerribben-Wieden	4
Jacob	17	Male	Weerribben-Wieden	5
Kim	17	Female	Weerribben-Wieden	2
Luna	18	Female	Weerribben-Wieden	7
Marian	18	Female	Weerribben-Wieden	6
Nina	19	Female	Weerribben-Wieden	4
Owen	19	Male	Weerribben-Wieden	7

Table 2: Participants list experts

Pseudonym	Function	Park	Gender	Age	Years involved
Researcher	Mentor	Weerribben-Wieden	Female	Twenties	3
Peter	Mentor	Drents-Friese Wold	Male	Thirties	4
Rosa	Director Junior Rangers Netherlands	General, close relation to Weerribben-Wieden	Female	Forties	8
Simon	Mentor	Weerribben-Wieden	Male	Fifties	6
Trudy	Coordinator	Weerribben-Wieden	Female	Fifties	8

### 5.3 Interview topics and analysis

As mentioned above, the interviews were designed as semi-structured interviews. With a list to go back to, topics were addressed in sometimes direct but also indirectly asked, as some experiences or opinions have these aspects in them, although are not apparent to the participant him or herself. In order to capture also the initially seemingly hidden or unthought-of experiences, some questions might not relate directly to learning or experiences, but gave stage to the interviewees to explain in their own way how they feel or see things that occurred during the programme. Furthermore it was important to keep an informal atmosphere during the interviews, so when stories or opinions were shared, questions would go further and deeper on that subject, compared to other interviews to ensure all interviewees had the opportunity to speak out their thoughts on every subject they felt related to at the time of the interview. The topic list was roughly divided into general questions to get into the topic and also to set the scene. Questions about the programme and how they felt about it, were followed by some direct or indirect questions about learning (e.g. what they believed was important from the programme). Experiences were also discussed in a direct and indirect fashion to let the interviewees decide for themselves what topic they wanted to discuss.

These subjects led to a rough set-up of semi-structured interviews. As mentioned above, this structure was a base to go back to, to ensure all subjects were discussed. But depending on how and what the interviewees mentioned, closer attention and relating questions were asked on those topics. The five sub-research questions stated at the beginning of this research are:

- What is the content and purpose of the Junior Ranger programme?
- What are the learning aspects of nature-based leisure activities?
- How do youth experience nature-based leisure activities?
- What does the youth expect and hope for when participating in nature-based activities?
- How do youth evaluate the role of learning during leisure activities?

These are used to formulate several interview questions, although many interview questions cover multiple aspects of one or more research questions. From the topic list, with the sub-research questions in mind, the following semi-structured interview was developed:

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### *Introduction*

- Explanation of the interview (see data collection methods)
- General personal questions such as name, age

This part of the interview was to set the interviewee at ease and to have any formal necessities out of the way for the rest of the interview. This introduction was presented in a small informal talk, but with a serious undertone, to make sure it was clear that anything said was always correct (to ensure answers were true and not socially desirable) and treated with confidentiality.

### *General questions concerning Junior Rangers*

- How long have you been part of Junior Rangers?
- Why did you join Junior Rangers back then?
- Why are you still a member of Junior Rangers after this time?
- What do you think is the most important reason why you are still a member?
- How would you describe Junior Rangers?
- Can you tell me what Junior Rangers do?
- How would you describe what being a Junior Ranger means?
- If you had to explain to friends what Junior Rangers are, what would you tell them?

This section was to introduce the topic in a way the participants felt they were absolutely able to answer the questions. The questions were asked to see what they thought of the programme in general and what their relation was towards the programme at the time of the interview. The next part of the interview was much more deeper and focussed, this section would give the participants the confidence to discuss a more difficult topic.

### *Learning aspects of the Junior Ranger programme*

- What are things you do at the Junior Rangers?
- What do you think is important of the Junior Rangers?
- What makes someone a good Junior Rangers in your opinion?
- If you think back to when you started with Junior Rangers and compare it to today, do you see differences in what you do, know or can do?
- What is important of the activities done in your opinion?
- What are characteristics a Junior Ranger should have?
- What things do you learn?
- Do you believe you learn a lot in the programme?
- Do you notice you are learning during the programme?
- Do you think it is important to learn?
- What is the most fun thing to learn about?

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- Why do you believe 'they' want you to learn?

This part of the interview was to trigger the participants to think about learning elements in the programme. Some questions were directly on the topic of learning, others were slightly covert topics concerning learning. The most questions were short and divided in several sections to not overwhelm participants with the topic and to give them the freedom to talk about what they thought was relevant.

### *Experiences*

- What do you like about the Junior Rangers?
- What is the most fun thing to do with the Junior Ranger programme?
- What is perhaps a lesser fun part?
- What do you hope for, or expect, when you go to an activity?
- What are the things you do during activities?
- Do you sometimes think back of what you did after an activity?
- Do you talk about your experiences at home?
- How do you see the future for yourself, next year or thereafter?

This last section was part of how they feel in general and experience parts of the programme. Again questions were kept short so they themselves could fill in what they experienced, this way the most memorable experiences were brought up, instead of the researcher handing examples to them which could bias their answers. The interview was closed after the verification of any parts that the participants felt were left out (see data collection methods). The conversation went on after switching of the recorder, but was not part of the official interview.

This is one set-up of how the interviews were roughly undertaken. When a special interest or topic was mentioned, the researcher followed up with extra questions to give the interviewees the chance to express their experiences via that topic. Due to the natural conversation the order of questions was not rigid and could have been answered already earlier on when the participant him- or herself started the topic by themselves.

The topics differed in set up when interviewing the experts. It was necessary to adjust the type of interview to comply to the knowledge and experience of the experts. The topics were more focussed on how the experts believed the adolescents were experiencing, expecting, learning and dealing with and from the programme (Appendix III). In this structure room was given for own topics or mentioning of personally important aspects as these interpretations are a valuable addition to the developed theory. The topics that were discussed were:

- Job description
- Junior Ranger programme
- Learning aspects programme

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- Implementation programme
  - Own experiences about youth
  - Development of youth
  - Interpretation experiences youth
  - Interpretation expectations youth
  - Interpretation of youth assessing learning

During the time the interviews were held, analysis already started to link subjects between the interviews. The data was transcribed literally due to the nature of this study and the goal to explore how youth experiences learning in an informal natural environment. Opinions and interpretations of their opinions are given and interpreted by the researcher, thus in order to stay as close as possible to the answers before interpreting the results, a literal representation of their words is highly preferable. When new interesting connections appeared, this would be taken in consideration during the data collection, for example to add or adjust questions. Qualitative analysis is a non-linear process and especially in exploratory research (Boeije, 2010), by going back and forth between the theory and the data to ensure the data is conclusive and interpreted in the right way. Beforehand it is difficult to predict what the outcome of the data is as there is dealt with experiences of different participants. Therefore, this way of analysing fits this particular research best.

## 5.4 Limitations

With this research some limitations are at hand. Due to time limits it is not possible to interview all Junior Rangers and aspirant Junior Rangers that are part of the Junior Ranger programme in the Netherlands. The researcher is familiar with the Junior Rangers in NP Weerribben-Wieden and is well aware that already within this group valuable insights and experiences are unique and worth interviewing to ensure a complete spectrum of the learning experiences of Junior Rangers in the Netherlands. This is no different from those who were not interviewed from the NP Drents-Friese Wold. Being familiar could be a limitation as well as a benefit to the researcher. Most adolescents are familiar with the researcher as the researcher herself is a mentor of Junior Rangers Weerribben-Wieden, this could higher the threshold to speak out their minds, instead of lowering as expressing ones opinion might be difficult to those who you know you will see again. To limit this possibility the researcher ensures to keep the interviews as informal as possible and express with great care the anonymity and her researcher's role instead of being a mentor at that time. From the NP Drents-Friese Wold some of the interviewees have not met the researcher before, which could also help to eliminate the possible drawback of being 'known' by the participants.

The observations done, are from the point of view of the researcher. This could be biased as some observations are recalled from before the research was initiated. This could trigger those memories fitting the research and confirm findings, while those experiences that don't fall within the framework might not be triggered.

The researcher is also fully aware that including other Junior Ranger programmes across the

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Dutch boarder, including more programmes throughout Europe, would give a better and completer insight on how learning is experienced by adolescents, but due to the type and goal of the research a face to face interview, especially when dealing with young people is preferable which is not possible to manage within the given time.

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## 6. Results

In this chapter results of the analysis are shown. During the continuous analysis of the data, several subjects seemed to return more frequently than others. These subjects are illustrated below. The paragraph headings represent the sub-questions with categories that showed similarities among each other. First a combined description of the programme, what the experts look for in the programme and hope the programme achieves with the involved youth.

The programme was described by the experts as a youth programme focussed on involving, guiding youth with in mind to foster and maintain the curiosity towards nature. They strive for involvement and respect for nature where an social exchange between youth is possible, and foremost that they 'have fun' during the activities. The ideal image would be to have young people become the ambassadors of nature and the National Parks they are aligned with, where they know about the ranger's work and that they have the room to strengthen their own competences. The hope that this will be carried out in the future as well. Whether this would be through the lasting memories of the wonderful time they had in nature with Junior Rangers or whether because of the knowledge they gained during the Junior Rangers is, nowadays, not that important anymore. The fact that it will be lasting, is considered to be the most important outcome.

### 6.1 Programme

#### Purpose of Junior Ranger programme

Experts mentioned that the purpose of the programme was essentially to connect and involve young people with nature that is close to home, or in their backyards so to speak. This was acknowledged by the adolescents themselves, in several stories about where they recalled activities, they mentioned all kinds of names close to the area, where they had memorable experiences. Experts also mentioned the bonding with nature or involvement of the youth.

"The involvement with nature. Yeah I find that is a main course. That, yeah, you are busy in a nature area. All kinds of activities you do in a nature area, that mainly has to do with nature or peripheral issues of it like culture and eh, more of all that sort of things. Eh, cutting reed, is a culture-like thing, it has to happen in nature, but is actually one, of its origins a livelihood, income. Eh fishermen, fish, in the field of fishing. But also of eh, yeah how as animals have to do with one another, how as the connection is with nature and animals is and so on. The circle, so that the circle becomes round again. The biological circle." –Simon–

"So yeah.. that is why we say everything that, yeah in fact everything that happens in such an area, that we do in the Junior Ranger programme. Whereby we also a couple of yeah, competences of the youth want to develop... It is not just eh, the hands-on activities, but also developing



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yourself in things you are good at, he, because you can develop that further.”  
–Rosa–

### Description of the Junior Ranger programme

The Junior Ranger programme exists of around 10 activities divided over the year. The description given by the experts mostly included ‘doing ranger-like’ activities, where the members learn all sorts of aspects that a ranger can come across in his work. One expert explained the programme shortly:

“Thus that means in our programme that eh, you go out with a forester in the field, that is where you just begin, eh but yeah, in such a nature park many more organisations work there other than just a forester, so also a volunteer of IVN [Institution of Nature Education] department you go along with, eh you go out, eh working in nature, in any matter at all, eh if they are young then you begin with light activities and if they are older, you ask, you desire simply a bit more. Eh and then knowledge of nature, that you then try to transfer and respect for nature.” -Trudy-

This was confirmed by adolescents as in working in nature, doing voluntary work and doing good things to help nature. Many adolescents gave the description of having the tasks of a forester (or translated into ranger in many countries), some even pointed out it was actually given in the name of the programme:

“Eh I would describe it as eh a very happy happening actually.. eh, always yeah just with happy people actually, so never with people.. nobody sits there with reluctance! So to say... Everybody is there because they themselves like it, and therefore eh.., it is always, it is also fun. Because everybody enjoys himself. And eh and maybe like rangers or.. or call it of the future, that is why it of course is called JUNIOR RANGER so..” -Harry, 16-

“You just do learn about eh the area and about the flora and fauna, and you learn a bit how the forester eh, divides his daily tasks” –Jacob, 17-

Working in nature which was in all interviews when asked what Junior Rangers do. Some gave the description of ‘being outside’ or ‘working for nature’, in nature with others, doing good things for nature. The descriptions of the activities themselves ranged from general subjects based like conservation and maintenance to more detailed events such as building plank bridges, camps, exchange projects and First Aid.

“Yeah, well eh, in the Netherlands we have so, at our eh.. especially in the Weerribben-Wieden with eh.. well activities in the woods and swamp and visiting open days and helping. And eh yeah also eh things like cutting reed and making fire. And of course at the end of the year the camp!” -Jacob, 17-

“Eh.. actually all sorts of different things, like searching stuff or making

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things or eh.. we also sometimes remove little trees that have to go, because it all becomes forest and there is no heath no more. Yeah, and we every time do something different. (...) we have for example also had First Aid, that is also very handy if you are in nature and eh.. we built a plank bridge, a path for in a very marshy and muddy area, very wet, so that you can just walk across it with normal shoes. So we, now that I think about it, we do it a lot of times with a purpose.. Yeah, often we do I think! Now that I think about it!” –Bibi, 12-

“If you go to the Junior Rangers, then you or going to do nature conservation, or you are actually going to learn about nature and then you also go and practice that, so to say in a mission or something. Later. That is always eh, yeah, comes back most of the time. If you then for example are doing nature conservation and suddenly you see a butterfly or something and you just had that day.. another time have had something about butterflies, then it is always discussed. That is kind of fun. (...) Then you don’t just do conservation, but then you do also recognize nature.” –Marian, 18-

“Eh.. well yeah pruning.. eh yeah, sometimes painting, paintwork, eh boots-trail we then constructed. Eh yeah once in a while more excursion-like eh, yeah.. think also, that, I wasn’t there, cutting reed, we did that once. So that is more maintenance. Trash pricking! We also did that!” –Kim, 17-

To describe what Junior Rangers are, some chose to describe it in an active manner. For example, some adolescents were describing Junior Rangers with active activities or mentioned it as voluntary work.

“Yeah, canoeing, at eh helping at days, special nature days, eh yeah. Hunting, well and eh yeah that sort of things” –David, 14-

“Voluntary work! (...) In the place where the bridge is painted, there it was necessary. Because that is at the visitors Centre, so then you make it more appealing for people to go there. (...) Because much more people come by boat and then they see the bridge.. and if they then see a run-down bridge, then you don’t stop as quick as you would when you see a nice bridge” –Ivan, 16-

### Description of Junior Rangers

The most given description of ‘a Junior Ranger’ given by the participants, was a group of people who are working in nature together. The distinctly Dutch word ‘gezellig’ or ‘gezelligheid’ was mentioned by almost every adolescent. Although hard to express this word in another language, it could be translated in this situation as ‘sociable’, ‘social’ or ‘companionable’, in the sense of having fun (with others). Having a good time was a big deal for the participants, as it was almost every time the first thing that came to mind when discussing what Junior Rangers were and what kind of group it was. As observer, the researcher noticed that during activities, the adolescents tend to find each other as soon as they arrive for an activity, whether to find their friends or just as one group. This differs per

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person, time spend within the Junior Ranger programme and age. The overall impression given during the observations is that seeking social contact is for most of the Junior Rangers one of the first actions to do when starting their morning with Junior Rangers. After that they are very excited to go and work.

“Someone who is busy with nature, with a group of people, that there then something.. yeah so something for it, for nature. Eh.. transferring toads, transferring frogs, working in the woods, maintaining things. Think such things..(...) they are busy outside and then they are all going to do sociable things” –Emily, 15-

“.. being busy in nature, eh sociably, doing good things for nature, so to say and at the same time having fun.” –Anna, 12-

“Eh yeah I thing as well that you just, eh a bit in general, the attitude of that it is fun to be busy in nature and eh also transmitting sociable and enthusiasm eh, (...) and also a bit, that you do feel a bit eh responsibility towards your national park and wanting to transmit that to others” –Nina, 19-

“Eh, well yeah I thing it also means that, a sort younger forester so to say, and then go, we always do all kinds of stuff, all kinds of activities that you can do well in the forest like eh, track tracing, we do that sometimes, sometimes we are going to make stuff..” –Bibi, 12-

Some mentioned that a Junior Ranger was someone who wasn't afraid to get dirty, or to get busy with hands-on activities. This was supported by Rosa as she noticed that the hand-on activities were part of the base of the programme, next to the earlier mentioned development. Getting busy without complaining was mentioned in several ways, so a general thought of 'no complaining, work well, dirt will wash of..' was a given mentality among the participants.

“.. that you shouldn't be afraid of insects and stuff.. that you are not afraid of dirty hands.” –David, 14-

### Image of Junior Rangers

The Junior Rangers were not only asked what makes someone a Junior Ranger, but also what they believed was the image of a good Junior Ranger. While observing the Junior Rangers, the researcher noticed that adolescents never were consciously trying to be a 'good' Junior Ranger. This explains why it took some participants a bit time to formulate their believes. Answers that were given mostly were related to social aspects, being a group, wanting to work and being socially and intrinsically involved. Knowledge was also mentioned, but far less than the group ethic.

“Being active, that you are not behind eh just. Always just participate and not

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if you once are not in the mood, that you don't do it (...) and if you don't like it, you still work along! Then you do put on a nice face and not eh, the whole time go.. sloughing or something.." –David, 14-

"..having interest, wanting to work well I guess. And respecting people for who they are. Not, so to say, being mean, work well. How you yourself to want treat, treat the other as well.. and that does do happen generally with the Junior Rangers" –Kim, 17-

"If you just eh, say do just really listen to everything that happens and that you do participate really well and stuff, but that in the meantime you also just.. can make jokes and have fun and stuff. But then do, that that just eh just combined with each other (...) not just being very serious.. because that, then you just belong to the adult group (..) that is not the purpose of Junior Rangers. We are young people, JUNIOR!!.. and eh, and eh yeah just a bit of laughter and so on, that is just part of it.." –Luna, 18-

Enthusiasm was also named, but not always directly related to being a 'good' Junior Ranger. It was often combined with the 'work-ethic', pulling your sleeves up and work, delivering good end results, taking the voluntary job seriously but as mentioned above, that you are also socially involved with the group and not being too serious all the time. As mentor the researcher observed there was never complained about the work, although repetitive work was sometimes sighed upon, but never with great reluctance or complete refusal. Repetitive work that many already had encountered numerous times, gave the biggest sighs, while at the same time the work was enthusiastically started.

"Well, you have to anyway, be enthusiastic. And you have to be a bit of an outdoors-person because we did have someone at the club who was way too much busy with appearance and was already upset if we had to, for example if she had to cut down a tree, because her fingernails could break" –Jacob, 17-

"If you.. you are part of the group.. Yeah if you are a part of the group, of the Junior Rangers.. and eh help well and so forth and have fun doing it" –Chris, 13-

Not many Junior Rangers showed that being a Junior Ranger was something to be carried outside the programme. A few participants did mention that part of being a 'good' Junior Ranger was that you were or were willing to carry that mentality all the way through in your daily life. As observer the researcher often noticed the manner of talking about Junior Rangers was often in a self-deprecating way or were at least a bit held-back by their own manner of thinking. Others did not felt bothered and spoke often freely about being part of Junior Rangers.

"You know, if you also practice it in your normal time. Yeah, if you also apply it in your own life, if for example eh.. yeah.. don't know. If you see something laying on the street and it is garbage and there is a container next to it that

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you just throw it in there, you know, if we are away for the morning, that you just participate in a good way. (...) ..[not] uninterested eh somewhere in a corner standing there or something, that you do actually participate with the things we do” –Marian, 18-

“..if you at the Junior Rangers actively participate. So eh, that you do, do your best and stuff and that you not.. do nothing at all.. and if you do indeed really have fun in doing it, thus if you are here for your own pleasure..(...) Yeah if you don’t mind to talk about it with other people or something, that you do not feel ashamed or something for being part of Junior Rangers. That is also important.” –Harry, 16-

Some participants did show some form a hesitation when the subject of telling friends about Junior Rangers was discussed. On varying levels different the Junior Rangers expressed that they were in some way holding back to tell they are member of this programme and this group. Telling people you like nature, was often seen as a softy thing, dull and not supported by those who had been talked to. Thus carrying out a message or your own identity was something almost three-quarter of the interviewees didn’t feel comfortable with.

“Eh to my friends I always explain.. ‘Yeah it is sort of a nature club, a sort of scouts but then different..’ (...) ‘there are also a lot of nice people there, and I am there for the group’ That is always my description sort of, because they and eh.. But it is always like I think, I always hear like.. I always think like ‘Yeah if I tell that I am part of this, that they then think ‘Oh what kind of [\*\*\*]-like thing..’, only they mostly do not think it is weird at all. That is good, that is a good thing.” –Luna, 18-

“..Yeah I would just tell that it is fun and that it is just being busy in nature. But I would not tell it so, because some, if.. I did tell it sometimes and then they think right away ‘Oh it is scouts’ and then I say like ‘Noho, because scouts is different and I like this more.’ (...) And some children think it is real fun and stuff, even though they think it is like scouts.” –Anna, 12-

“Yeah, well a lot of friends don’t know it.. Yeah they.. well.., it is just on a Saturday morning so then I don’t do anything anyway with friends. So than I don’t have to, I don’t tell it, but.. I would also tell that it now is a eh become a large group of friends, where I would love to go to..” –Marian, 18-

The other part of the interviewees did not discuss this in detail or did not mind telling others about them being a Junior Ranger. They weren’t bothered by the idea, they liked something that might seem strange to others.

“To friends?! Well often I just say eh that we with a group of youth, most of the time eh then we just go out and we go into the nature. And then they think ‘Rather you than me, you know..!’ that is what they most of the time

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say, but yeah that is all one's own opinion. Well there are also a few that react positively.” –Jacob, 17-

“.. [I] have had to do that before, because many question what it is..(...) and then I say often that we then always go into the woods to do all kinds of fun and completely different activities.” –Bibi, 12-

## 6.2 Learning

### Learning aspects

Learning aspects were mentioned by the experts as well on social aspects as knowing the ins and outs of a ranger's work. The actual knowledge was also mentioned, though in a less prominent manner. According to one of the mentors there are three main pedagogical needs a person and therefor adolescents too, desires which are the following:

“‘Competency’, so you want to experience that you can do something and that eh if you can that it will go better every time, so that you are competent. There is a basic need for ‘Autonomy’, so that you can independently get something done and partly have influence on, on what you are doing, and a basic need for ‘Relation’, so everybody likes it to notice that you are worth it. That others see that an indeed respected eh that you are respected for who you are.” –Peter-

Having high expectation of adolescents on these area's was also described and could be summarized as giving them credit for what they are capable of. Giving them the freedom to discover for themselves what works and how to deal with situations. This was also described by the other mentor as well. The experts mentioned that development of the self was a big part of Junior Rangers, along with respect for nature, getting to know 'your' area and know what involves the conservation of such an area. The social factor, like group bonding, having fun and developing presentation skills were more related to the whole of Junior Ranger. Getting across real knowledge was proven to be difficult throughout the years, thus the emphasis is put on having such a good time, building memories that will stay and foster the 'feeling for nature' became more important. It was believed that would have a greater impact than persistently trying to teach them plants or other subjects.

“..if you think it is important to build a strong, durable relation with youth, that, that will have a bond with the area, that will become ambassadors of the area (...) of which you hope that the whole attitude, changes.. (...) I have to admit that it is actually a bit.. that it is hard.. to get some knowledge across.. (...) you notice that certain things just doesn't interest them and then you are in a hesitant [position of] what are you going to do, do you continue with transferring knowledge or are you making sure that the experience is that good... that they had such a wonderful time.. that that sticks with them.. Well we got this far.. that also took, it had a process, that we believe that this experience, feeling good outside is more important than transferring

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knowledge.” –Rosa-

The adolescents themselves expressed dealing with nature and dealing with social aspects as being learned aspects. As well as awareness and respect for nature, skills such as practical skills and social skill were mentioned. Not only the actual learned aspects were mentioned, but the way of learning as well as the amount of learning was discussed. Some expressed they learned a lot, but not anymore or not as much as before.

“In the meantime not anymore I think, eh I did learn a lot. Eh yeah, a lot of awareness of nature around you (...) unconsciously you take up many things, if one time.. you go catching mice, you see a mouse up close, wild mouse and in the meantime they point out ten plants and you don’t remember all of them, but here and there still two or three out of ten (...) so I think that over the years I have learned quite a lot.” –Nina, 19-

“Especially also how nature really works together and how conservation here is helping supporting that. Yeah because otherwise it will become forest, with that reed and that it stays real reed-land and the kind of birds and that sort of thing that are here” –Owen, 19-

“You learn how you good with eh, yeah really good can treat nature actually and how eh for example.. Like that reed cutting an how happens because that is of course a particular trade and, and yeah that if we go along with that hunter, that is of course also just really interesting to know how that happens. (...) So that sort of things, you do learn a lot about, yeah craftsmanship-things and so, and eh.. but you also learn just to interact with people actually! No, for real! Well you know some, some people need, need just a bit more attention, that are here. Well, you really lean to deal with that, and that is good in a way, it is good.” –Luna, 18-

“Yeah, pretty much. Not just about for example plants, but I think also on the social level” –Kim, 17-

“Well, among others, making fire. Before Junior Rangers I had no idea how to do that and now we have that ‘fire-steel’. And eh, I have to honestly say that it doesn’t work that well, but eh, you do learn and eh we also learned how things work with the reed and eh often also about animals a lot.. about plants..” –Jacob, 17-

### Importance of learning

The adolescents were asked whether they thought learning was important or not. Most of them said it was, but the explanation differed a lot between the answers. Some mentioned the essence of surviving in nature when necessary, while others saw the importance for the community as the reason why learning was important. Participants themselves were concerned about the knowledge

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that would get lost when youth in general stopped to learn about nature, so future perspectives for nature were discussed as well.

“Eh, yeah. I think it [learning in the programme] is good.. Because we do have to learn to.. Yeah we are often in the woods and we do need to learn about plants and stuff (...) Eh.. well, if you are in the woods and you are going to eat something that is poisonous.. that is not very clever.. But if you knew that beforehand, if you have had learned that then you wouldn't have eaten it.” –Chris, 13-

“Well, I think it is important that they [Junior Rangers] just so eh it a bit their eh, their knowledge share.. thus making other people a bit conscious that they not eh, should not through rubbish or something in nature or anything and that they.. Yeah that it is not good and that it will always stays (...) just, I thing just that you have a generation that still does know all about nature, and thus someone, people who watch over it a bit... actually for the future, because these days there are not much lessons given or something, about how everything works in nature. For example with the biology classes you learn a whole lot about cellular divisions and I don't know what more, but not really about the forest itself or something (...) Maybe a bit conscious, that they make the people a bit conscious. While it still is.” –Harry, 16-

“Eh.. well to still eh, keep the ‘youth’ up to date with all that fuss.. [“What fuss?”] Haha, well yeah how everything eh works here, in nature and stuff. And in the reed fields and stuff, because that eh, from what I have heard of and stuff that has gotten lesser eh, gets, fewer are arriving, no new reed-cutters [job specialism] and those who exist are ever getting older and eventually eh.. then there has to be someone that will replace that.” –Glenn, 16-

“Yeah I think actually of everything a bit. That you just really learn plants and animals, but also eh, sort of more.. yeah have respect for nature and so. Most Junior Rangers will have that already from themselves, otherwise you don't join [the programme] as quickly I think. Eh but also that you also yeah something yeah a bit about nature as a whole, how it all works, how that well, how that works.. that you also experience and learn a bit more” –Nina, 19-

A couple of people answered learning with the future in mind, as in the future of themselves, the park or the benefits that could be gained in the near future for both nature and themselves. This points out that learning was present in their minds, but certainly not as a main factor, but also not as a mere extra treat either.

“Actually it is, because it is maybe handy later for biology or so. Because probably it will come back sometime, because I had for example seen something in the biology book about plants and something about animals and I knew right away ‘Oh, that is this animal and this is, that is that plant and it



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works like this and that works like that.” -Anna, 12-

“Well in the hope we perhaps, like us with our boating license.. that we also really are going to do voluntary work.. or that we eventually can become mentors of Junior Rangers or something” -Owen, 19-

“Yeah.. well I don’t know actually.. I think it is mainly.. it is, it can be a preparation for later, that you know more of animals and plants. Because if you for example take up that direction, then it is handy.. if you are busy there then maybe it is handy that in that area you know what you have to take in account, because there grows this or that plant or find this or that bird and that is nice. I think it is handy that you know something, that you don’t start somewhere and that you then think ‘Hey.. where did all the rabbits go?’ or something. That first you had a population and that everything is gone. That you take in consideration like ‘Gosh, there, that you shouldn’t pick because it is rare and.. so I think that is why it is also important.” -Kim, 17-

Only a few actually mentioned learning itself. That it is important to learn for the learning itself and that this might come in handy later on, just to have common knowledge, just in case you might need it in the future. This illustrates that some do see learning as a very important aspect of the programme itself.

“Sometimes it is important I think.. But sometimes, you can forget those kind of things as well, because then [it is] just information but you better have that on a piece of paper than.. memorize it in your head. (...) that you don’t have to remember all things, but that for example a couple things you have to remember, because some things can be dangerous or also can be fun and can be good. If you just sort of remember the dangerous things and the fun things, and that what is in between a bit.., just try to remember a bit, but if you did forget it, then that is not so bad. -Emily, 15-

“It is not the most important thing that you learn, but it is important that you learn something. So it is not the main purpose of [learning], but just, just like ‘Maybe you learn someday, something.’..” -Fay, 15-

“We learn with the Junior Rangers to actually and fairly really ‘see’.. Most people can walk by everything and don’t see it. Like [fellow Junior Ranger] last time, he had to guide a group and there was a deer, well.. five metres from the path.. and everybody walked past it.. until he said ‘Look, there is a deer.’ And then everybody was suddenly ‘Oh look a deer!’ (...) We really learn to see. People look, but we learn to ‘see’.” -Owen, 19-

### Role of learning

When asked what they felt about the fact that learning was part of the programme, Junior Rangers expressed that without learning there would not be much left. To some learning was a clear extra

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added value to the programme. Quite a few mentioned that the level of learning was sometimes compromised by the fact that they felt it sometimes was belittling, thus learning was not that motivating anymore, the value of learning was linked to the feeling of accomplishment.

“I think it is good. Eh only there has to be paid attention to it that it doesn’t become too childish. Eh now and then, for example it says in the programme like ‘Joh, we are going to learn this and that’ and then it is just a bit too childish, a bit belittling so to say. But that is also the difference between the oldest and youngest group, because the youngest are quite a bit younger, so it is difficult to find a balance in that I guess. But it is good to include things in the programme to learn from.” –Nina, 19-

Half of the participants said they didn’t really notice they were learning, they knew it happens, but that at the actual time spent there, you are not aware you learn. Some thought they didn’t notice because they loved being in nature. Others believed because of the ease of the set up made the learning come natural. ‘You just know..’ was often mentioned, in many different contexts throughout the interviews. Certain subject had become such a common part of the programme, that many didn’t consider it learning. The researcher also observed that during activities, that the learning of subjects during the activities triggers development of social skill as well, working together, explaining, helping another with the tasks happens often ‘without asking’. Sometimes when mentors are aware of someone struggling with either a task or his or her social skills, they are intentionally pulled in to get more involved, giving the adolescents a little nudge towards developing their own abilities.

“Well, in general you don’t even notice.. Because yeah, they have put it in there, in such a way that you, yeah then it looks obvious. En then you don’t notice it like ‘this is learning’ so yeah..” –Jacob, 17-

“Well, I think it is actually, is fun, just because. Because you do those activities and.. sometimes you are also sort of proud of what you made, or have learned. And then ah.. actually I don’t really notice it that much.. yeah.. (...) Well I don’t notice that they really put it [learning] into it [the programme] or so.. Yeah, sometimes you do, but that is also.. I think that is handy as well, because then you learn something again.” –Bibi, 12-

“No, because it comes a bit naturally. It eh, yeah, anyway if you are already six years part of Junior Rangers it is already different, but eh, in the first years yeah, you just participate in the activities and then it just goes naturally. It is not like ‘Oh, this I really need to memorize in my head’, it is just yeah. (...) when you walk through nature and that then things are being told, then you just remember that. You don’t notice it, but is kind of fun that for example, you know more than others. If you look at my group of friends and that I then know so much more about nature than they do. Thén you notice it, but if you are just being busy, then you don’t really notice that you learn a lot.” –Marian, 18-

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“Well, you don’t notice..! That doesn’t matter, because you don’t notice. Only things from eh, with the exam.. you know from aspirant Junior Ranger to Junior Ranger.. Then it was like ‘Oh sh\*t we have to do something with the exam! Oh f\*ck I don’t remember anything!! AAHH!!’ and then we just went, we had a walk, en then I went at every leaf like ‘Oh ok, what is this again, oh yeah and that was from that tree’ and then and we started learning all these, but we already knew them. Just practice a bit and you’ll have it back again.” –Fay, 15-

“..that is just what Junior Rangers áre, so they initiated it because of that. To teach people.. and because they also like to learn. And eh.. I guess they don’t do it because they have to, of someone.. but. Just because it is fun!” –Harry, 16-

“..but I find it fun to learn things as well. Yeah but it is also fun to learn while you don’t notice it. Not that you get tests or something, just.. (...) it is just fun to learn, because then you just know. Then it is just also more fun, because they ask every time again, so at a given moment you get it in your head, haha!” –Anna, 12-

“Eh, a bit.. not eh yeah for example, sometimes when I recognize some trees or so, then I notice that I have learned, but other than that not really” –Glenn, 16-

“Look, at school for example, you think ‘Ah..’, you don’t want it so much, you do that to pass the test (...) But there everybody pays attention because they like it. So it is not that you notice you are learning it, but you learn it because you like it and therefore it comes naturally.” –Harry, 16-

“I don’t think all the time. But I think in the most cases that you do get something from it. That you do remember, that it goes somewhere, that it will stick somewhere. That if you see something again that you then think ‘Oh yeah, that was it’ or ‘O yeah, that..’..” –Emily, 15-

Some expressed how the programme would look like without any learning aspects brought in the programme. It didn’t make much sense to them to have a programme without learning, the purpose was mainly to learn or have a learning experience. The researcher observed during several activities, that when new themes were introduced, all Junior Rangers were excited to ‘see’ what it entailed. This shows learning through discovery is important for many, while maybe not noticed by themselves.

“..because when you only would be working it would be so different. If you didn’t learn stat much, just them saying ‘this is what you have to do, that is what you have to do’, then eh, you could also get a job.. yeah, so if.. this you learn for your own fun.. so, if you.. and that is why it is important actually, actually that you learn something. Because that is what it is for, it is there to

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learn from and if it wouldn't be in there, well then you could also eh.. do something else!" –Harry, 16-

I think it will then become almost working, then it is just like 'Well guys, go and cut reed!' Because they are not going to tell you how it works, because then you learn! Then something is missing I guess." –Jacob, 17-

Jacob also expressed why learning was supposed to be in the programme according to him, the use of the whole programme was, in his mind, gone when learning was taken out of the equation:

"Well it is fine right [learning in the programme], yeah if you think 'I went there just for fun, I walked around all morning and now I'm going to sit down again.', Yeah than you just can go to a playground. (...) Otherwise it is not really Junior Rangers, otherwise it is just being outside, just thinking about nothing" –Jacob, 17-

Some mentioned again the importance of learning, that if these subjects are not taught to people or adolescents it would get lost in the future. These represent the communal feeling that was very alive among many, though not all, Junior Rangers on different levels. On different levels concerns were expressed with often very realistic ideas on the situation and what was needed to make the community, the public or the government aware and to take action.

"Because they do, from generation, to generation, want to pass on something to learn about nature. That you always.. that you do learn from someone and that you can pass it on again to someone else. (...) Because you do then have that, that later the people also know about nature and what they then have to do with it." –Emily, 15-

"Well, I think that anyway they do think of us like what we want to know and I think that it is also just good for nature that more and more people know how they should handle it [nature]. That is just better, if you don't know how you, how nature works and that kind of things, then you will take care worse care of it. Then you think like 'Oh well.. I can just throw the garbage out of the window, that doesn't matter anyway'. As a Junior Ranger you should sort of know that that is not done. And eh, yeah if you learn that kind of stuff and just learn about nature as well, then yeah. That is important, then you will take much better care of it. Yeah, nature is vulnerable, so it is always good that more people know how it that works." –Marian, 18-

"So that you can become a forester, then you are already prepared and then you can enrol faster." –Ivan, 16-

"Yeah, I think that is good, because that is what the programme is about and that eh, you have also a nice group and have a good time. That, that is of

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course also incredibly fun, but that is just an extra thing.. so to say. So the programme is based on that you learn something, from this. So that is just good, because it is just yeah.. it is good to also learn something here. Because otherwise that eh, yeah a lot will go lost I think if.. but a lot will get lost I think if eh, if there is just nothing told to youth about these things.” –Luna, 18-

One person explicitly said it was for the younger participants of the programme, as he already knew so much, that he had the feeling it wasn’t meant for him anymore:

“Yeah again for those newer ones that they also learn it. (...) yeah.. now you already know it a bit, and mostly yeah eh.. some, a lot of things like ‘Oh yeah, I already knew that’..” –David, 14-

Some didn’t notice they learned anything from the programme. This was also mentioned by the experts as well as observed by the researcher herself, especially when learning seemed to be naturally imbedded into the programme. Although they did see the effects on hindsight that they did actually had learned some things:

“Eh, well yeah, Normally you don’t give it a moment thought that you already know that much. But now you do! (...) Yeah, I didn’t gave it a moment thought actually, that you learn so much, because you actually do learn quite a lot.” –Bibi, 12-

“Yeah, a little bit.. Yeah, because I had to think a lot just now, I didn’t know much of what I have had learned.” –Chris, 13-

The same participant answered just before that to the question whether he learned a lot, with which he acknowledges that there is more learned then he could actually mention, it has become common to him in a way that he didn’t even can’t recall what it exactly was:

“Yeah.., I know a lot, I have learned a lot. (...) Eh yeah, well, like tree species and stuff, because that.. and eh First Aid, we learned a lot.” –Chris, 13-

## 6.3 Experiences

### Experiences of activities

#### Positive experiences

The participants also told stories about the things they like the most of the Junior Ranger programme. These insights help to identify where learning takes is positioned in their experiences or whether at some occasions learning might have been hidden in between the activities. There was no surprise when camps were the most mentioned favourite activities, next to canoeing or going to

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discover new and different areas. Exploration and the ‘fun-factor’ as also mentioned by one coordinator meant the most to the youth.

“The camp! Sociably sitting at the fire, at night and then during the day sometimes go somewhere with the boat and then do ‘something’..” –Ivan, 16-

“Those outings to Germany and so and camps! Yeah that is nice yeah. Very sociable, I just like that. Then you learn to know more, yeah. Like also people, how they really are behaving.. Yeah then they are also a bit more loosely.” –David, 14-

“Camps I think, because you just have that little bit of extra time to do all sorts of things. And further, eh yeah I guess the mornings that you are really working in nature I think. So that more than when you are getting a tour somewhere, so to say, well that you go on a hike with a guide for example is also fun.. if you really go to work, that I personally like more.” –Nina, 19-

“Eh, well that would be the activities where we go to another National Park actually... Well, just on eh if you eh.. to Zuid Kennemerland or something (...) there we learned quite a lot because it just was new and then you grasp it much easier actually, because you haven’t heard it already a thousand times.” –Luna, 18-

The social aspect was again mentioned by several Junior Rangers, although never mentioned on its own as a learning aspect. When a specific event was mentioned they included it was memorable because of the surrounding experiences, thus getting together with others of their own age or friends.

“The most fun thing I did was burning reed. That was just really companionable, just sitting at the fire with everyone. And camps, I always thought they were very nice. A whole weekend together, then you get to know each other really well. (...) Actually I would like my sister.., I would recommend to go to Junior Rangers, because yeah in the beginning it sounds very stupid because you are busy with nature.. for friends it sounds silly, in the beginning. But it is very informative and you always get something out of it. I know how to make a fire when I somewhere suddenly eh, get stranded or so. Yeah, you, you, also the friends you make are a good experience. You learn to know people and, but also eh that you know how you have yeah, have to take care of nature.” –Marian, 18-

“Eh, just being in nature, because that is what I love and then with people of my own age” –Bibi, 12-

“Eh, I think just eh, actually having fun and eh just with other teenagers, so

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eh.. catching up and actually with those friends and that sort of things, that is actually the most fun part! And working together (...) and that is everything, everything you do together.. So eh, yeah that is what I actually like best, that you interact with other people and on eh, that in a place that you actually like. (...) they are all a bit the same people, that are a bit the 'same' as you, so having the same kind of interests and that kind of things and because of that you can make friends easily and that is why I think it is so much fun of so. Just social people" –Harry, 16-

Activities were not often specifically mentioned, but some showed a lot of enthusiasm when discussing active participation in the programme. Observations of the researcher herself underline the fact that some adolescents really want to have a very active morning, to lose some energy at the beginning of the day. Some experts also mentioned that some adolescents actually come to work and social interaction comes next. The active work ethic was explained, for example by Kim and Fay, among other participants:

"If it is a bit that eh yeah I think excursion and boating and stuff.. but I think that secretly.. if so to say, a whole cluster of wood can be cleared. Then you get to demolish things! Yeah just cutting everything down and stuff.. That is what I also like to do, secretly.. Yeah, it is kind of bad, but it's just for one time really just fun to do, because you are just being busy and yeah, actually you are never allowed. And that was never allowed and for once everything, everything down! (...) You're allowed to do responsible clearing" –Kim, 17-

"Eh.. everything? (...) Well nearly everything, for example you cut your finger, you get shocked by an electric wire, that is not so much fun.. eh, everything just.. you know, you just go ahead being busy you know, that is fun to do, really being busy with it and then do things en then 'Jeeey!!' And it has a purpose..." –Fay, 15-

Some answers did not specifically fall into activities, but rather in accomplishments. A real sense of pride was mentioned in many forms and events of expressing concurring fear or concurring an assignment:

"Being outside, with a group, being busy, that sometimes you learn things that you didn't know or that you concur your fear. (...) The most fun, I think camp, we have that every year." –Emily, 15-

"Eh, that you have to make some things and making things with my hands I am not always that good at.. and then it won't work again.. (...) no, but sometimes it is, it is fun because then you have some sort of challenge and when it does work it is like 'Yess!! It worked!' (...) 'Yeah, I have made it!'" –Bibi, 12-

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### Negative experiences

To the question what the adolescents didn't like, also gave a variety of different opinions. The answers given, showed that the adolescents had strong beliefs about certain subjects or really just wanted to be outside and not contained in a room and sit still.

“Yeah, that hunting, that doesn't seem fun to me! No. That I just don't think, I don't like that! A goose that just drops down dead to the ground..” –David, 14-

To the question why they still put this activity in the programme even though a great deal of people don't like this activity he mentioned that it was showing the real world, he was not the only Junior Ranger that believed that although maybe controversial, people did need or wanted to know how it exactly works and what it entails. But they did not see this as a negative aspect, but more or less an exploration of the world.

“That you also know the truth about nature. Yeah it happens, but.. in real nature it happens as well, but it is still different than eh.. a hunter that just shoots them out of the sky, I don't think it... is nice. But I see it on television, you see, that just happens, that there are too many geese, but it is just not such a nice idea, to shoot them out of the sky. As a birdwatcher you don't shoot birds out of the sky. –David, 14-

“..if they talk about plants for hours long.” –Ivan, 16-

Some were that enthusiastic about the Junior Rangers, that they couldn't think of things they didn't like, leaving out one or two particular events, like getting soaked through the rain or cold days. As long as the group was fun and happy, many believed that everything would be fine and great anyway.

“Eh, well.. not, actually not much, (...) because it is also like, if they even don't give us anything, we will make it fun ourselves! Oh one time I really didn't like it, because it was so cold outside (...)That I didn't like, that it was that cold.. well rain or so doesn't matter much to me, because yeah you are getting wet with everybody else, so.. you don't have to pity yourself because.. Yeah the rest has the same thing so, that doesn't really matter” –Harry, 16-

“Well the thing that you only have explanations and further nothing much to 'do' or just only 'doing' stuff and no explanation or so. That is also nothing much. For example eh, actually then working too seriously” –Glenn, 16-

Accomplishment and feeling worthwhile or having purpose were also cited. Having a feeling of purpose was essential, if that was missing in the programme, they did mention it as a major drawback of the programme. Some felt belittled by the tasks given sometimes, that



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were not up to their level.

“Well, in fact I always like to help with like the Day of the National Parks and the ‘Wilde buitendag’ for example, but eh if on such a day you get deployed as a coffee lady or something, that is slightly less fun. So a bit more challenging, or a bit more on the fact that you are a Junior Ranger and not just a helper. So from the point of view ‘I am a Junior Ranger’ and work with that” –Nina, 19-

“Eh, in the beginning I didn’t like the leadership that much, because we all had to separate from each other, anyway. Yeah you do want, in nature you know, with your peers and we were separated all the time. Well yeah, they learned from that, now we are all together.” –Marian, 18-

“Well what I didn’t like was the last time, we were so far away with catching water bugs.. We have had in three hours’ time only four kids that came by! So that was just not so much fun, if you have to wait so long and you have not much something like shadow or so and you can’t do much yourself..” –Kim, 17-

“That time with working in the reed, I was actually happy it rained quite a bit (...) I was happy we went to do something different, because I didn’t feel like cutting reed. (...) Well, you can cut yourself very easily on reed, reed cuts and anyway I didn’t had much want, because it was the first time ever and I didn’t had a lot of liking to directly go work really hard the first time. Rather something else, do something easy, but yeah, you cannot take into account only one person.” –Anna, 12-

A third of the interviewed adolescents mentioned the days of sitting still, having to listen to too obvious things or explanations that (seemed) to take forever. The most expressed ‘boring’ event was the parent-morning, which includes all these aspects of sitting still to hearing explanations that seemed unnecessary to the youth themselves. As observer the researcher did notice this during activities, but was also aware that when it was boring for one, he or she did not interfere the programme, but let others enjoy if they felt it was enjoyable for them. The same conclusion was made by other experts, who mentioned the calmness and respect to others when a subject was not to their own liking.

“Well that parents-day so.. (...) that they have a PowerPoint presentation and you are sitting on a chair and watch.. That is, then I think ‘Yea, then I could have gone to school’ But yeah it is educative, but it is mostly for the parents and then I have something like.. then they for example tell what we did last year and then I think.. ‘Yeah, we were there, we know!!’..” –Jacob, 17-

“Oh, I always really find the parents-day terrible!! First you have to hear all the presentation, quite nice actually but the schedule is always way to tight

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(...) and then we are required to, with the parents, do something and most of the time it is bad weather (...) Nobody likes that! Yeah maybe the presentations about the international camps, that is perhaps fun! The rest is all.. then they tell what Junior Rangers are... Well, everybody knows what the Junior Rangers are, because we ARE Junior Rangers!" –Luna, 18-

### Experiences of learning

Experiences that were specifically focussed on learning can be divided in what they liked to learn, knew they learned and changes they saw themselves from the beginning of the programme up until now. As diverse as the subjects were they like to learn from or learn about, as comparable were the answers to what they had learned. Some youth mentioned that they loved to learn about subject such as animals and plants.

"The most fun? I guess.. something about.. plants.. Yeah I do like flowers and so. Thus that I also like. That you do know a bit like, this is this and that is.. you better not touch that one.. (...) Yeah, nettles you should absolutely not touch! And what helps against it, if you did do it, that it is, that you can cure it with something. That is.. I don't know its name anymore.. such.. a ..lionplant.. something of a dandelion." –Emily, 15-

"Eh yeah animals and plants I like.. and birds, those small birds I like! I kind of like animals. Eh well yeah that, that they are ere, that they sometimes run wild and fly and.. that they are here just 'being wild'. That they are wild animals and not really tame animals or so. Some are, but most are just wild animals. And they just do come here." –Bibi, 12-

"About an animal.. that I like. Like a fox or so, a wolf.. I find those really nice animals! Or a badger.. that I do like, to know facts or so (...) Yeah, birds of prey, but those other birds don't interest me at all." –Chris, 14-

Others like to learn about activities, such as bush craft or surviving in nature. And thus the more practical way of doing or the 'survival'-skills that might come in handy in the future.

"What I like most to learn.. Making fire! That was definitely the most fun! Really! For real the most fun! Making fire! For example, for example, that is just going to happen sometime in the Netherlands.. someone.. me, I am getting lost in the woods, right? And I have to survive for three nights or so, that I then know facts, what I need, that I survive, what I can eat, that I know where I can make clothes from.. even though it is only three days.. I can't even make clothes.. from nettles or I don't know, that I can eat spinach, or something" –Fay, 15-

"Well, the bush craft part.. that is more interesting than, than, the theory that now is.." –Glenn, 16-

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One person mentioned not a specific subject or activity but a way of engaging in nature. This was mentioned by others as well, but never that explicitly. They mentioned that knowing and recognizing things that others outside the programme did not, gave them a feeling of being special in that area. They know more than the average person, which was told with a sense of pride in their posture.

“Especially ‘seeing’ learning to ‘see’. That you see so much more than before. (...) that you don’t open up a clump of grass and see... nothing. If you learn to see, you see a footprint or so, and that kind of things. That you look into the woods and see the birds flying in between..” –Owen, 19-

Some persons don’t have a specific preference, but want to experience everything. One person expressed he didn’t know what to learn. Not because he ‘knew’ everything, but he felt really exploratory and wanted to engage in all kinds of things he never had been confronted with. Another also said a broad spectrum was what he liked most.

“I don’t know what I should learn now.. Maybe they come with subjects once, and that I think ‘Oh that is fun! I can learn from that’, but now I don’t know that yet. –Ivan, 16-

While just before that, he mentioned:

“I want to experience it, because you haven’t experienced it, you have to experience everything once.” –Ivan, 16-

“I think it doesn’t really matter to me, it makes me.. I don’t think it is very interesting if they tell how for example they cut trees or something, that I don’t care about, if it is just about nature itself, that is what I like most. But actually.. actually I think everything is interesting. And yeah it actually, I have not really a favourite thing” –Harry, 16-

“Yeah.. I would love the most to learn from everything a little bit, so that when later on eh, I can end up in a profession in nature and actually it is best that you know a bit of everything.” –Jacob, 17-

To the question if Jacob then wanted to know as much as possible, he actually said: “Yeah, that is fun”. This shows that learning in particular could be a goal on its own, the ‘knowing’ of anything at all was the trigger itself for these Junior Rangers.

### Individual development

The adolescents notices a diverse change in themselves, from conquering fear, becoming tougher to seeing more than others and small things such as remembering plant names. Some could not actually

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name what was different, although by all experts, including the researcher, development per Junior Ranger were very apparent. Some grew enormously in social skills, such as being (more) social, learning to take another into account, expressing what they actually think, feel or mean as well as more specific skills such as presentation skills and the obvious maturing of the individuals. Others were noticed because of their involvement and persistence to stay involved or to possibly make career in this area. Some were noticed because of special interests, such as plants and birds, while others had a common sense of all aspects where any type of knowledge was involved.

Many adolescents mentioned some form of gained knowledge on the broad subjects of nature (like plants and tree species and use) and animals.

“Only there were, I always call them rabbit’s leaves, they are part of the dandelion. And I didn’t know that it was a dandelion. So now I do know that. En since then they are not rabbit’s leaves, but dandelion, so..” –Anna, 12-

“You do know more things of plants and herbs and what plant you can’t eat and you can. First I didn’t know you could eat ground-ivy, or dandelion! (...) now you know that birch eh, how eh it burns well and eh, that you can make lemonade from it..” –David, 14-

“I get out a lot more I think! Yeah, I think it helps that I have more time now again, but I am a lot more outside again (...) and it gives some peace also. That you are getting outside sometimes. (...) I eh know more eh more swamp plants I think. Trillium and stuff I didn’t know that yet, so now I do know and it really got stuck in my head! I think it is because it interests you, then you remember it..” –Kim, 17-

“I know a lot more anyway (...) I got a lot more information, you know. I, I should actually know how to slaughter an animal, but I wasn’t there, so but.. I know now why eh, electric wire.. there shouldn’t be twigs touching it, I know why trees are planted somewhere and why not, I know the difference between a lot of trees, I know the differences of flowers, I know the difference between a nettle and a thorn bush, but I knew that already anyhow... Yeah al that sort of things, you know, just sort of all kinds of facts, I know how to make fire, I know everything! No, almost everything..” –Fay, 15-

“Anyway eh.. y.. Yeah you always learn something. There are enough things I didn’t know when I just came here. Well, I did for example not know a thing about the black tern and the rafts and stuff. That eh there I never did know about and then we had one morning that theme and now I do know how it works with the black terns.” –Jacob, 17-

People also mentioned awareness in different situations about nature or its conservation and management of the direct level of their area.

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“And further that you start to look with different eyes to nature areas. (...) there is conservation and it is not just nature (...) That too is a very important awareness I think. (...) that you also learn a bit about surviving in nature and so, what you don’t necessarily need for nature conservation and nature maintenance, but with such a camp you have a bit extra time for to spend some attention to.” –Nina, 19-

“Yeah, I was a bit younger so didn’t know that much, I was already member of the scouts.. Pff.. eh, Yeah I knew what kind of trees and stuff are, but never heard of Junior Rangers or what it was. (...) Yeah I did learn some things, but I don’t know what things (...) now more, I did know what heath was and so and woods, and that it was big, but that it was this big I think I didn’t know that.” –Chris, 13-

“Well I know a lot more about how it actually in the park itself.. which is close to my place.. a couple, I think.. one kilometre that way, there begins the forest, so.. and that park and I know a whole lot more about it, so how they, yeah how it all started, a bit history.. and the.. yeah how they all try to, to arrange, with the plants and tree species and what they then, why they for example take out areas of forest, that I did learn actually. –Harry, 16-

Two girls stated they developed in a personal way by getting tougher, others mentioned also personal development like becoming more social and secure.

“I notice of myself that I have become tougher. Eh, then first it was like ‘Tieuww, little creatures and mud.. bleh.’ Eh and that you, at a given moment you also go.. yeah you learn more and more to have a more realistic look like ‘Well yeah, it is not that bad’ and making fires for example, that you can do that much easier and that because of that in general you remember more and get a more independent attitude and stuff. –Nina, 19-

“Yeah eh, I think transferring the toads, I never did that before. I did conquer my fear with that. Yeah really, on my bare hand holding a toad or a frog.. So that was really nice.. No, I still don’t think they are nice animals, but I dare to do it! If I have to, I’ll just do it.” –Emily, 15-

“.. I became more spontaneous I think just, so easier to other teenagers.. who are maybe strange or so, just talk with them and.. sociable, making it companionable and stuff, I didn’t do that very well before.” –Harry, 16-

Owen mentioned the fact that learning itself can improve over time as well.

“I begin to remember more and more, in the beginning it was more like ‘Ok, if

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I have to...' and you forget it again, but I really begin to remember more and more" –Owen, 19-

Some people stated that they did learn a lot in the past, but because of their growth of knowledge the experience of learning has dropped. The provided level seems not to be compatible to the level of their personal needs anymore. As observer, the researcher noticed that when activities were a repetition in some sort of form, the adolescents never lost their ethic to work but the enthusiasm degraded fast for the subject at hand.

"It could be more.. I think so, but... Because I have a lot of things of which I think 'Yeah, a lot of people here will have learned from it, but it happens to be that I already know this.' I have that regularly." –Jacob, 17-

"Yeah, maybe now a bit less, but earlier you learned really a lot and then also if you were doing nature conservation, then there were also other things that were looked at like this is this (...) You learn actually also to work together here. You have to do everything together. Such a duck decoy can't be renovated by you alone, no. Then yeah, but then you have to lift something together or something, you learn to deal with other people as well. (...) so not just nature, it is also interaction with people so to say." –Marian, 18-

"sometimes yes, sometimes no. For example when we were here last time.. I don't know exactly, what we were going to do, but then we went over that path and it got explained how you could recognize trees, some trees and stuff and yeah, that eh there I did learn something from." –Glenn, 16-

## 6.4 Expectations

General expectations can be divided into what the Junior Rangers believe to be important of the programme itself, their hopes and their expectations. Naming expectations seemed not so easy for several adolescents, the most frequently answers given started with good nice sunny weather. Important aspects were mostly socially driven, furthermore having a good programme and the opportunity to be active for a few hours.

### Important aspects of Junior Ranger programme

Social interaction was a major aspect that was named frequently to the question what they believed to be important of the programme itself. 'Being together' sums up the main thought on social interaction. Also the idea that future prospects were important were mentioned.

"Yeah, that it is not only work.. also.. that it still has to be a bit fun too. Just making a bit of fun too. (...) Yeah otherwise I would take a job.." –Glenn, 16-

"That you are together. (...) that you do something really useful.. you know,

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just that you don't plant useless trees somewhere, but that it has its use that the tree is standing there." –Fay, 15-

"That you are out and that I do eh pick up more, yeah in this way I can also find contacts for the future" –Jacob, 17-

"That it is companionable (...) that nobody does things secretory. That they do fun things, for example at camp, yeah that you do just participate in the group." –David, 14-

Some adolescents made it clear that not just being together was enough, but also respecting each other and treating everyone the same. This underlines the importance of social belonging from and towards others. This was also many times observed by the researcher during several activities. Although there are many different types of people part of the group, where not everybody is on the same line on several personal aspects, respect was always there towards each other.

"Well that eh, that everybody is being nice to each other and that there eh is a good atmosphere still in the group. If it is up to me, it is just very sociable and eh, also to pick something up from it." –Jacob, 17-

"Eh I think that it more one group. That it yeah. That everyone is accepted more (...) Because there are so many different types in the group and still it always goes right, still it goes.. and that is actually quite extraordinary. (...) Nobody falls outside the group, I think that is very important." –Kim, 17-

A couple of participants cited that ethical matters were important in different ways, being noticed and recognized as Junior Ranger outside the programme and having the feeling of self-worthiness and approval of the community was part of that view.

"Eh.. well, I think it is important that there still just is, that everyone still just knows that there are youth that likes nature and that they don't necessarily have to be weird and submissive characters. That they are also very normal people, so to say." –Luna, 18-

As important aspects of the programme, several people mentioned that the manner in which the programme was set up, was of great importance. Variety and a clear programme with a purpose were mentioned by three participants in particular.

"Maybe a bit variation. That there is variation in it, so that eh.. that it is a bit educative, a bit active.. and not always the same, because we did had some troubles with that. Every time again, 'ah, no, not cutting trees again!' that it was always almost the same." –Harry, 16-

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“Variety.. the same, not always the same. (...) not always the same location.”  
–David, 14-

“Okay for me I find it pleasant if you know what you are actually doing. That there is an explanation like ‘Joh, we are working here and we do that because..’ well and then the reason. (...) and further I think it is very important that your are busy as a group and that you close it as a group as well like ‘Well we are done now here and eh guys, nice job and we are going home!’..” –Nina, 19-

Some said working in nature was essential, while others were more specific and talked about doing volunteer work with each other and as part of community services. Observed by the researcher, she concluded that working in nature is, next to the time spend with others were said to be the most important factors of Junior Rangers, this was confirmed by the experts as well as the adolescents.

“That we so to say, conserve nature, because that has to be done by volunteers and yeah, we are for that sort of, we want to be in nature, so then I think it is important that we do that as well. Because there are not many volunteers I think in nature (...) Yeah because then you are busy in nature.. if you have only theories about.. yeah that is always fun, but you also want to put it into practice, getting busy.” –Marian, 18-

“That you do eh, learn other things, that you normally don’t learn at school. And that you are outside for the whole, till 12.00 [AM]. (...) with other children there, with older and younger children and not just all with the same age, what you have in class. So that is very companionable, then you get that you learn a lot from each other.” –Emily, 15-

“That you do things for nature. Just working for nature, to make it better eh, yeah just, yeah if a group works together” –Anna, 12-

“It is just working in nature, working in the national park (...) the social thing” –Ivan, 16-

“That we do something and being outside. Yeah, because I am inside a lot (...) just for a little while doing things” –Chris, 14-

## Hope

Among weather, which was mentioned by almost half of the participants, other factors they hoped for were: social, work-related or a good programme. As mentioned above, this was a hard question to answer to. The researcher noticed as mentor that hopes went deeper than just social interaction and working. Those aspects were the more apparent aspects to youth, while as observer of the



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adolescents the researcher saw herself that the wish for exploration and learning was perhaps the base for the mentioned desires. The enthusiasm when new aspects were offered was clearly noticed at several occasions of the programme. This was confirmed by other experts as well.

“In general in the first place nice weather!” –Kim, 17-

The social aspect was mentioned by many participants on different levels, to the question what they hoped for, four mentioned this aspect again. As mentioned before, this also fits into the ‘relation’-aspect expert Peter mentioned, and the quotes of the youth validates his thoughts and believes.

“that [fellow Junior Rangers] are there” –Fay, 15-

“That it is companionable, fun.” –Ivan, 16-

“To have a sociable morning. Yeah where you are busy with nature, but also that it is fun. Always when I go to Junior Rangers, then I do think like ‘Well, I hope they are there, then it is fun’.” –Marian, 18-

“That my friends are coming.” –Glenn, 16-

Some of the participants talked about their hopes of some nice active activities, being outside doing things in nature.

“That we are going to do a lot actually, that we really are going to do something, otherwise it is just so much more boring so to say. Then it is more static and there has to be just a bit.. something to do there.” –Luna, 18-

“..busy in nature and it should not be ‘not fun’, then you will leave really quickly.” –Marian, 18-

“That some of the theory stays, something sticks with it and that it just is really nice weather. So that we.. and that there is enough work! That not at half of the day we ‘Yeah eh, it is going actually a bit fast.. take it a bit more easy..’” –Owen, 19-

Those that mentioned the programme, hoped for a well thought programme that was well prepared. Well-prepared in the sense that everything runs smoothly and is adjusted to their needs (as well as hopes).

“..and that it is also something interesting, that it is a bit set up well and that you don’t have to wait long or yah, a bit of a good programme. Yeah that when you arrive, that there is a logical structure in it, like from welcoming

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and that you do something and that you don't have to wait for an hour somewhere or that you have to hurry a lot or something.” –Nina, 19-

“That they had a good preparation” –Ivan, 16-

Two mentioned they didn't really hope for anything, they didn't care much to know in advance what they were going to do. This is, without context, perhaps a bit strange, but the researcher noticed during the interviews that these were very passionate adolescents. The explanation of 'not hoping' in combination with the context, indicates that they actually believe that what they seek is already present at the activities. There is no doubt in their minds that what they seek is there, thus there is no need for hoping for certain aspects.

“What I hope for.. Ah, mostly.. I think I don't hope that much, I eh, go there.. (...) sometimes I didn't even read the email what it said, that I only looked for where and when it is..” –Harry, 16-

“Yeah, that doesn't matter to me. Yeah when it is raining really hard, then I really don't want to! If it is nice weather, yeah then yeah, but if it really.. if it rains or drizzles, I don't like that at all either.” –Chris, 13-

Some made a summary of different aspects, which are already mentioned above. For example, Nina (19) quoted next to programme also good weather and social gathering as important aspects.

“Well, sometimes I like it also to be here, to be in the outdoor-centre, eh of course you hope for nice weather! If you go outside.. and I hope my friend is there and that you can see a lot of nature and that it is going to be fun of course!” –Bibi, 12-

## Expectations

Some of the participants also shared their expectations. Some expectations were very clearly stated, while others mentioned not to have any expectations and would just 'go and see'. Expressions given by some explained their expectations, could be divided into expectations depending on the programme and social expectations, such as friends or having fun. As researcher the observations on expectations were not always clear as well, though it can be said that some adolescents did not think much about the activity, just before the actual happening, but were nonetheless curious what it actually entailed. Thus from the observer point of view it can be related to the fact that not much other specific expectations were present other than what the programme promised them.

Like mentioned above for the aspect 'hope', the same adolescents had no expectations at all either.

“No, yeah mostly you get an email but.. than you already know, what you are going to do and stuff, yeah and what we are going to do further.” –Chris, 13-

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“No, actually I don’t expect anything either..” –Harry, 16-

Most made a point about their expectations related to the programme, depending on the programme they expected ‘something’ or, related to the programme and to be working outside.

“Well yeah I eh.. they. I have had something like, then I do have expectations but I also have something like ‘Well, that theme? I have no idea what to expect from that!’ and then yeah.. it is often if you have something with a theme, a sort connection, yeah if you feel something for that theme. Then you have higher expectations, then you have something like ‘Oh, ok..?!’..” –Jacob, 17-

“Yeah what is a bit on the programme, but then there are always things they, that are not planned or.. Yeah but if you in general stick to the programme (...) then you know like ‘Gosh, that is going to happen’ or ‘That is what I am sort of what I am going to do’. Or yeah, sometimes you don’t know (...)We didn’t know what we were allowed to do, so sometimes it is a big surprise. I know for certain that somewhere, somewhere in nature, can get busy..” –Kim, 17-

“Well, that depends a bit on eh, what we are going to do.. eh if we are really going out to work really well, or to more to learn something or parents-evening, that we teach the parents what we have done and what we are going to do.” –Owen, 19-

“Sometimes you know already a bit in advance what is going to happen. But for the rest.. they only put in a mail what is going to happen, but for the rest they don’t give away that much!” –Bibi, 12-

Three participants mentioned the expectation of friends being at the activities or having fun.

“Depends on what kind of activity it is. But mostly it is just, eh that my friends are coming. If friends are there, it is anyway, what or anyway fun.” –Glenn, 16-

“Just fun, there.” –David, 14-

“I think we just are going to do something with the whole group, so one, two, three and four.” –Anna, 12-

Nina mentioned that she expected to go outside, but also to have a social gathering at the same time.

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“Well, getting out for a little while, being outside, especially that a bit of moving, a bit of fresh air. Eh, well, depending from who I know that are coming if it is sociable, but eh still the fresh air and getting outside.” –Nina, 19-

## 6.5 Evaluation

Learning by the adolescents themselves was positively evaluated, although only the learning that was naturally built-in into the programme. As already mentioned in previous paragraphs the effortless of learning, that it goes on a natural way was evaluated as enjoyable, where fascination for certain subjects such as birding or plant and sheer exploration increased this enjoyable learning. During observations the researcher could conclude that freedom of choosing your own interest of learning, by paying more attention than with other subjects for example, was also found in activities. Another feeling of freedom was noticed by the researcher as the adolescents felt they were, for a part, in charge of the division of the tasks as well as the division of time during the activities. While it was clearly present in activities as observed by the researcher, being outside while doing work, learning about for example a butterfly went much more smoothly than when told within a closed room with a presentation. The adolescents noticed themselves that the latter was much more dull, but did not seem to notice that learning itself became different because of the different setting. The following quotes show the findings above, although many findings here are also illustrated in quotes of previous paragraphs and are not repeated here.

“Well not if I just don’t want to [learn] (...) you do can pay attention or you cannot pay attention. (...) When it is a fun subject. Like, with animals. Then I listen!” –Ivan, 16-

“..when you are done and it is like ‘You can have a break’ and then we take a longer break (...) it is not bad, at school it’s like (...) everything is you must, must, must and here you cán.- Fay, 15-

Most saw the importance of learning as mentioned above for both themselves and the community. Another evaluation, which was not as positive, concerned the level of their own capabilities, which was in their mind underestimated. Some examples were already given above in the sense of belittling and childish. Some just mentioned the repetition of some learning aspect (see quotes above), which left them only with a feeling of boredom but nothing extreme.

The following quotes were made by several people, but were left completely anonymous, for the answers could be too personal or traced back to specific people due to the characteristic answers.

“... don’t just immediately say belittling like ‘Yeah, that is just not possible and this and that.. and just listen once to as too, because actually they don’t

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really listen, you know.. But they do treat us in a sort of childish way.. yeah.. eh compared to teachers at school, they really treat you now as adults and that is what you are used to that people do that and then you come here and you get treated as a little child.”

“I think I have that [new experiences] in the beginning a bit more than now.. because I, because there are now do are activities that sometimes you already have done and sometimes get repeated.”

“You don’t learn from that either, exactly and just on such a camp you just do need a bit independency, because then you learn that! (...) because [mentor] leaves you very free in all sorts of things, that is just really nice! Yeah because that is super chill, because if someone is already being very panicky before something really happens, than you get stressed yourself, and think ‘Woww, what is this?!’ (...) just that, that they don’t trust us... that is just really silly”

These elements were also mentioned by an expert, however in the opposite way. She mentioned to do listen and take the ideas, sort of, seriously. That the experience concerning this item is different between an expert and adolescents is perhaps part of the incomprehension that was felt. Some mentioned to be excluded from activities as they would know too much. Though they were older adolescents (within the age-range of Junior Rangers), it left them with an uncomfortable feeling.

As mentioned in the beginning of the paragraph, adolescents evaluated learning positive if it was imbedded in the programme in a way they didn’t notice it too much. When discussing a trial project, a handbook for the Junior Rangers, many disliked this way of learning, it was instantly called dull, boring and too school like and not Junior Ranger fitted (e.g. unpractical to carry, no practical information, nothing new). Here they thought learning was too obvious and not fun anymore, or even purposeless to them.

“That handbook that lays somewhere and you don’t think about it. Has probably a lot of interesting information in it, and I have read a couple of pages once, but I honestly have to say I don’t really keep up with it (...) That is the real ‘learning’ part of the Junior Rangers and I know I should keep it up, I do know that, but yeah then you also have school next to it.. and then I think it could happen, but I don’t give myself the time right now and sometimes they say: ‘You have to take it to the activity’ But that is such a carry” –Jacob, 17-

“I thought it was a really nice idea, but the whole set-up yeah was I think more for the youngest groups. (...) yeah the idea was fun but in some kind of way, it didn’t work so well. At least I had not, didn’t feel inclined to put the papers actually in that folder and then reread it again, so to say. (...) to do make it a success, you should I think, something, a bit more professionalise it. Eh like that for example the pages that you get have the same lay-out and a real structure in it...” –Nina, 19-

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## 7. Discussion

As described in the theory, there are three aspects that help to explain how youth experiences learning in nature-based settings: free-choice learning, leisure experiences and environmental learning. These three aspects will be used to discuss the findings of the results stated in the previous chapter. As stated in the theoretical framework, all three aspects help to answer the research questions, although not every theory will be applicable for every sub question. Together the sub questions form a comprehensive view on this exploratory research concerning experiences of youth in nature-based activities. Each paragraph in this discussion is representing a sub question stated in paragraph 1.2:

- What is the content and purpose of the Junior Ranger programme?
- What are the learning aspects of nature-based leisure activities?
- How do youth experience nature-based leisure activities?
- What does the youth expect and hope for when participating in nature-based activities?
- How do youth evaluate the role of learning during leisure activities?

The scientific objective and the research questions will be answered in this chapter through linking the three aspects of the theory to the results illustrated in the previous chapter.

### 7.1 Purpose and content

Barrat Hacking et al. (2007) stated that environmental learning is part of the understanding and development of a person's knowledge and understanding, including attitudes and behaviour. Raising awareness and building a concern for the environment are according to Chawla and Flanders Cushing (2007) also part of this development. These aspects are found in the organisation as well purpose of the Junior Ranger programme, where the goal and vision behind the programme is to involve the adolescents more with nature and its management. The idea of the programme does not only consists of having the youth experiencing the work a 'ranger' has to do, but also to have a more responsible attitude, with respect for nature. These elements could be part of the key experiences of adolescents (Chawla and Flanders Cushing, 2007). As stated earlier, Chawla and Flanders Cushing (2007) have researched studies with participants in later life. The outcomes were that they believed their early-on life experiences in nature were essential for responsible environmental behaviour (ibid.). This study captured the beliefs and thoughts of the adolescents during the experience-building phase, which brings this research to another point of view than theirs. Although the perspectives are different, these adolescents seem to have the same belief for a lifelong interest in nature and its conservation. Which in turn was the main goal of the experts interviewed during this study. The Junior Ranger programme as depicted in the results seems to fit precisely into the concept of environmental learning itself. Most of the results for this section of the research resulted out of the experts' interviews, but it can be said that many Junior Rangers themselves also had a very clear understanding of the content, but more importantly the purpose of this programme.

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## 7.2 Learning aspects

Similar to Caldwell and Witt (2011), who formed seven conditions to foster environmental learning, it was mentioned by multiple interviewed experts that people seek to fulfil three basic needs. The first one he mentioned was autonomy, which aligns with the autonomy development and self-determination in the study of Caldwell and Witt (2011). Having a sense of independency or developing it as such, is argued to be a valuable part of adolescent development during leisure and recreation. The competence was also mentioned by the experts as well as in Caldwell and Witt (2011) their study, where the feeling of accomplishment or achievement is explained to be part of developing self-esteem or feeling worthy of ones capabilities. The last comparison that can be made is based on relations and social skills. One expert explained this aspect as, feeling that you are allowed to be and to be there. The feeling of being wanted and that you are respected for who you are, fits into developing social skills and social connections (ibid.). Another point that was explicitly mentioned by multiple experts in this research, which also came to the foreground in Caldwell and Witt their research, covered the intrinsic motivation. Which again was also mentioned by Price et al. (2009). Next to these four aforementioned conditions, no expert mentioned the last three conditions for youth development during leisure stated by Caldwell and Witt (2011). Emotional response, identity or civic engagement (ibid.) were not explicitly covered in the results of the experts or adolescents. Developing moral compass (as part of civic engagement) was mentioned by several experts. In the results it showed that indeed the three basic needs mentioned by the expert were found in the answers given by the adolescents. These basic needs were not always described by the youth in a positive way. It was directly and also indirectly mentioned that there was a lack of independency and especially a lack of possibilities to develop ones competence. This was often related to the feeling of not being trusted to handle certain aspects of activities, or the chance to prove themselves being able to cope with new situations. Some others did feel the sense of pride when something was achieved, but the overall conclusion of some of the participants was that although it was a lot of fun to participate, they often did feel belittled or sometimes not valued to their capabilities. Observed by the researcher as well, 'relation' was very strong represented in the results. Every participant mentioned the word 'gezellig' or an variant of this unique Dutch word (shortly translated as having fun together, sociable or companionable). Group ethics were a major (positive) issue among the Junior Rangers, supporting everyone, how different one might be, was a unquestionable value. Some even mentioned themselves that this trait was quite unique. Although many differences could be found between individuals, the one common value they shared, nature, was valued by all. This feeling of belonging and unique ethos (Stebbins, 1982) is what binds this group and makes them so close. The intrinsic motivation was shown in the way the youth answered the questions, full enthusiasm starting stories without asking about it, or with a blunt answer as just wanting to be there, and that was it. The 'just because it is fun'-factor was mentioned many times, throughout the interviews it would become clear what this 'fun'-factor was for the adolescents. Chawla and Flanders Cushing (2007) recognize that intrinsic rewards of participation is often found by youth in building and identifying friendships, thus it can be regarded as a value on its own. All experts as well as adolescents, noticed that one had to have this intrinsic motivation perhaps on different levels though, otherwise they wouldn't participate anyway in such a programme.

The learning aspects of these activities were also stated as very practical knowledge, such as remembering names of animals and plants. There was only one Junior Ranger who made during the

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interview a conscious connection to the purpose of knowing these facts which was explained as useful facts when dealing with nature. Otherwise 'dealing with nature' was a common description of what learning meant to the participants, along with the knowledge of what is needed to support nature and learning about its management and issues that rangers have to deal with. As these are very specific attributes that are part of the programme, it is hard to compare them individually to previous researches. Comparisons which are possible, are between the intentions of the aspects. Combined with the importance of learning and the role of learning, given by the youth, it is made clear that the communal understanding, which is also the main goal of environmental learning, was a strong asset of the programme. In the previous chapter, the importance of the programme was discussed with the youth themselves. They showed that many had a concern for the future. When people don't know how nature works or what it entails, valuable information would be lost. The understanding of learning in free-choice settings brings light to the setting of this research, although learning is one of the most important basics of the Junior Ranger programme, it seems not to be prominently present to the youth.

### 7.3 Experiences

As described in the theory of paragraph 3.1, constructivism explains that experiences are key to learning. Falk (2005) stated that experiences are triggered with free-choice learning, which were in formal settings not as vivid compared to informal settings. Due to the intrinsic motivation people have to visit (perhaps unconsciously seeking) certain free-choice learning settings, they are more open from the beginning to new experiences, which include learning. The settings given by Ballantyne and Packer (2005) and Kola-Olusanya (2005) already have the intention to teach or give the opportunity to explore. Exploration was an experience mentioned throughout the interviews as part of learning. People who go to such settings have the open mind-set from within themselves to learn more or discover new things. This is supported in the research done by Packer (2006), where the majority of the visitors were experiencing learning as enjoyable. In the results this came forth in expressions as having fun and enjoying the outside and being active as well.

Furthermore Packer (2006) stated that in his research learning for fun entailed: discovery, exploration, mental stimulation and excitement, which are again found in the settings of free-choice learning just mentioned above. Although people might not consciously know that it is a learning experience that they seek, the combination of the setting and an enjoyable experience suggests it actually is, or can be, what motivated them. In this research the results show that all participants were motivated to come in the first place. Secondly all of them mentioned that they loved being busy in nature and either explore or learn about this subject in the broadest sense (from specific objects such as plants to social skills or management of nature parks). Furthermore the interest in certain subjects is not much discussed in previous researches, thus there is no thorough manner to compare the specific findings with the intrinsic value that triggers this interest.

Falk (2005) argues in his theory on free-choice learning that 'free-choice' is a perception, which suggests that it depends per individual what could be determined as free-choice and thus free-choice learning settings as well. This makes it arguable that whatever setting that is recognized as free-choice can be by others seen as less or not a free-choice setting at all. During the interviews



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Junior Rangers expressed their experiences not as being obliged to do things. There was only the common thought of a good work ethic among each other. They did expect from each other to, when present at the activity, you don't sit back and relax all the time, but at least that the given tasks were carried out in a sensible and good manner. Of course time to relax was important to them as well, so they had the feeling of being able to choose when to work and relax a bit and some mentioned that they even had the choice to learn or not, by paying attention to certain topics or not. Still it could be argued that this setting might seem free choice to certain people due to the willingness to join in their leisure time, but to others it could be viewed as less free-choice as it is a programme and thus not fitting into the free-choice setting set by Falk (2005).

Another part of the theory are the types of leisure argued by Stebbins (1987; 1997; 2005). He mentioned three types of which all could have possibly been found in the results. During the interviews and thereafter during the analysis, observations of the researcher and the results from the interviews made no conclusive point towards either one of these concepts. Project-based was short-lived and only for the fact that the programme has an ending after a couple of years, there were no similarities to this leisure type. Both casual leisure and serious leisure did seem to have commonalities as to how the youth experienced leisure, but neither one of the types seem to encompass the complete situation of Junior Rangers. Casual leisure was supposedly easy, immediately, intrinsically rewarding, short-lived pleasurable activities that required little to no special training (Stebbins, 1997). This does seem to fit into the programme and to answers given by Junior Rangers, but although the programme was experienced as naturally and obvious, easy to do and does indeed require not much training to participate, it also had similarities with serious leisure by Stebbins (1982). In his research in 1982 he mentioned that serious leisure had a goal to develop career in leisure activities where self-enrichment, feelings of accomplishment, recreation, social interaction and belongingness as well as lasting physical products were among its features. These were also features mentioned by Junior Rangers alongside features of casual leisure. Further he mentioned that there would be activities that one perseveres at and a unique ethos was developed. Different features of both types of leisure fits the Junior Rangers perfectly, but combining these typologies would really explain how youth experiences this programme in leisure. Not only between the adolescents the differences of both leisure types were clearly noted, but also within the individual Junior Ranger. One explanation could be that casual leisure might actually be a necessity to achieve serious leisure or to facilitate serious leisure to achieve the best and most 'effective' outcome. Without the casual 'characteristics' serious leisure would not be as appealing to many of the participants. Which was found in the responses to having no learning at all in the programme, which didn't go well with the youth. Another part that did seem to come forth in the results but was not mentioned in the typology of Stebbins (1982, 1997), was that not all these features were all self-centred as the typologies of Stebbins (1982, 1997) seem to be. Many participants mentioned that community work was important, like building awareness among themselves and others. Essentially, everybody is self-centred because everything someone does, even for another person, will make them (feel) better. In this sense, you could place community work, respect and awareness building, under the self-gratification, self-enrichment and self-actualisation of Stebbins (1982), but it is highly questioned whether in this research, this would do justice to these thoughts that live among the youth.

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## 7.4 Expectations and hope

From the results it shows that youth does not hold very clear and explicit expectations or hopes regarding the programme of Junior Rangers. It can be said that, as argued by Kola-Olusanya in 2005, youth develops in three phases. Changes during those phases could explain why they might be struggling with expressing their thoughts. Packer (2006) concluded, among other findings: 'most visitors don't come with a deliberate intention to learn, they do seek or are unconsciously drawn into, an experience that incorporates learning' (2006: 334). The findings of this research indicate, that indeed the participant did not deliberately come to learn, but this is arguable as they perhaps were not able to express clearly their expectations and hopes. When discussing experiences, interpretation is necessary, so caution is always in its place concerning this subject.

The results did show that some general hopes and expectations, like good weather and 'doing things in nature', came to mind, which only relate to the casual leisure described by Stebbins (1997). Though with the observations of the researcher and experts, it seems more appropriate in this situation to assume the expectations go deeper than sunny weather, but are not clearly noticed by the adolescents. Further, a third of the interviewees mentioned they felt the way activities were brought to them were sometimes childish and belittling while others mentioned they sometimes just didn't learn anymore because they already knew (thus no novelty or exploration anymore) (Van Winkle & Lagay, 2012). This was said not only by those who had participated in the programme the longest, but also by those in the middle-aged section of the group. Only the youngest members of the Junior Rangers never mentioned experiencing the feeling of being belittled or having too much repetition. This confirms again the needs explained by the expert Peter and the arguments given by Caldwell and Witt (2011) on achievement and competence.

## 7.5 Evaluation of learning

The evaluation of learning was presented by Packer with his statements on learning for fun. He found four elements that would facilitate in the experience of learning for fun. Fascination and discovery were both the first he mentioned (*ibid.*), which were indicated by many adolescents as well. The fact that things seemed to go effortless was repeated multiple times in the results and was also confirmed by Packer (2006) and Van Winkle and Lagay (2012). Availability of choice and the last, appeal to multiple senses (Packer, 2006) were not mentioned as much but were nonetheless present in the interviews and observations. These are indications of how people could evaluate learning. One finding from the research that hasn't been yet mentioned here, was that many adolescents remarked the role of learning to be important due to communal benefits for example the future concerns for nature, next to the 'having fun' factor. Self-growth and a sense of responsibility were important factors concerning conscious learning. The six qualities of tourism learning experiences stated by Van Winkle and Lagay (2012) were present in mostly 'fun and engagement' and exploration. Contrast and authentication (*ibid.*) were not mentioned by youth, while 'freedom and flexibility' and reflection (*ibid.*) were not clearly stated, but indirectly found in the results. Freedom and flexibility also align with the freedom of choice by Packer (2006). This could be because Van Winkle and Lagay (2012) focussed on tourism, while leisure participants from this research might seek other qualities in a

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learning experience. What was found clearly in the results was that when learning became actually 'learning' (the handbook), it was not as fun as Packer (2006) stated in his theory. This was also found in the results concerned the earlier mentioned feeling of gaining competence and responsibilities. These results showed that overall learning could be fun as long as it was allowed to grow in all aspects such as independency and this came with a feeling of being trusted, both personally as well as in competences. This finding was mentioned by Caldwell and Witt (2011) as important aspects to develop, but they were also deemed important as an experience expressed by the adolescents themselves. This was not explicitly stated by Packer (2006) as an aspect of 'learning for fun', although it could be placed under his statement of potentially transformative experience, but this does not do justice to the desire voiced by the youth on this developmental matter.

## 7.6 Possible limitations

Dillon (2003) mentioned more should be researched with the focus on learning. This has been done from the point of view from constructivism, with continuous learning, but might as well been appropriate to take the field of humanism in consideration as well. From the point of view from constructivism similarities were found in hindsight with humanism (e.g. expert Peter). In this research the humanism theory was only slightly touched upon. A more comprehensive view on leisure experiences could have brought better and deeper insights in the experiences of learning in leisure, where leisure is taking a larger part of the focus. Furthermore, translating the interviews could lead to a different interpretation from the analysis to the discussion, although the researcher made the decision to use the Dutch ad verbatim transcriptions to analyse, the choice was made to translate the quotes into English as these results could be of international interest as well, due to the international sphere of the programme itself.

Not all members of the Junior Rangers were participants in the study. Due to time constraints this was not possible in this particular research. The researcher is well aware of the valuable information that could have been provided when all members were included. The same argument can be shared concerning the senior Junior Rangers. Two were included in the research, having a completer view of how 'veteran' Junior Rangers experienced these years will give a better and more encompassing insight on how learning is experienced by youth. Thereby, the best research approach would have been to monitor Junior Rangers from the beginning for multiple years. This was not possible due to time constraints, it is highly recommendable for future researches. This research was merely a moment within the programme where the youth have shared their thoughts and recall their knowledge at the beginning of the programme. This is difficult for the participants to exactly remember what they knew years ago and secondly it is already biased as it is their interpretation of an memory. Following participants throughout the years gives not only multiple insights from the adolescents themselves, but also from the researcher's point of view in observing the youth from the beginning. The researcher was as an observer able to recall from past experiences as well, but recalling and observing with the research in mind will produce different findings. This was kept in mind during the analysis. Obtaining experiences of the same adolescents throughout the years they participate in the programme, brings the possibility to actually follow different aspects of development and learning.

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## 8. Conclusion

The objective of this research was to explore the experiences that youth have during nature-based activities. In the field of research on leisure and learning together combined with nature settings, youth is a group that has been neglected. Nature conservation will still be a prominent issue in the future concerning its continuation, as well as raising awareness on issues surrounding nature, nature parks and conservation. This research set out to give youth the opportunity to share their experiences of learning in nature-based activities. It is known, from many studies, that children have different perspectives and experiences compared to adults. Adolescents are the group in between that is not well researched yet on these topics. Either the age group is different or the focus is not on learning or the experiences are examined in formal settings. This study started with a twofold of problem statements. As just mentioned, there is not much found on literature about youth in the aforementioned setting and secondly the youth have recently, in the congress of October 2013, stated their wish to be more involved in nature. In recent developments in nature conservation, adolescents and young adults are urging organisations to invest in learning in and about nature. This showed youth does have the intention to learn about nature, but feel the current facilities are not yet reaching their expectations. Therefore this research was guided by the following main research question:

### **How do youth experience learning aspects of nature-based leisure activities?**

In this research the particular focus was on the Junior Ranger programme, which is designed and initiated to develop awareness of nature and building a strong and lasting bond between youth and protected nature areas or nature parks. The research focussed on how adolescents experience learning in nature-based settings. Theories were combined of free-choice learning, environmental learning, leisure and experiences in these fields. As discussed in chapter seven, the used theories do not fully encompass the setting of this research, mainly because of the missing focus on youth. Despite the missing of a theory that includes all aspects the used theories did facilitate in answering the research question. The following conclusions can be drawn from this research:

First of all, learning is represented in the programme for youth on three different levels: conscious learning, conscious learning on hind-sight and subconscious learning. Adolescents are most of the time aware that they are learning, although sometimes not directly on the spot. With subconscious learning, the learner never realizes they actually learned, even on hind-sight it will not become apparent and remains unnoticed. The separation in these categories does not mean that one adolescent can be identified by just one of these types of experiences. Almost all youth that participated in this research mentioned at least two ways of learned experiences, whether it was directly stated or mentioned while not noticing that their told experience was constructed by learning. Learning was appreciated more when it was not too prominently present, while leaving the learning aspect out would even be worse according to the youth.

Secondly, the importance of learning was pointed out by adolescents. Learning is important for themselves and at the same time also for the development and conservation of nature in the future. A high moral compass is present within the Junior Ranger group, varying on different levels

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from feeling responsible to actively participating in voluntary work to support nature. They recognize the role of learning in the programme to be important and essential in the programme itself. Youth is involved and believes that in the future, they will have a more conscious mind about nature and its qualities as well as threats and concerns were mentioned abundantly by the Junior Rangers. The interests they expressed, show that they actually are intrinsically motivated to at least be in nature and experience it. According to constructivism, someone is automatically learning when he or she builds up experiences. On its own, continuous learning is not able to explain learning is intentionally sought. The intrinsic motivation and the notion of constructivism do explain the motivation to go and explore and learn. Without learning merged into the programme, they felt that the essential part of the programme was missing. This is linked to the intrinsic value of wanting to know and experience more about, in this case, nature. The experiences of the activities confirmed that learning is essential; learning about other parks, making fire and building objects gives them the opportunity to put in to practise what they had learned earlier. Thus learning is considered to be an important asset, both within and outside the actual programme.

Thirdly, the youth is aware of the effect learning has on their development. This is only noticed when either conscious learning or conscious learning on hind-sight are present. The youth in the Junior Ranger programme are eager to learn. When learning is not present enough, as in not being challenged on their own level, the programme does not fulfil their needs anymore. Learning is fun and, as mentioned above, an essential part of the experience of leisure. Furthermore, when people intentionally go to places or settings such as in this research for their own pleasure, 'learning for fun' is validated even more. Personal development is noticed by the adolescents, although not necessarily linked to learning itself. The developments that are noticed, concern both cognitive as well as social development. When the basic needs of autonomy, competence and relation are met, learning is meaningful and enjoyable. Especially emphasis is put on competence and secondly autonomy by youth themselves. These get more critical attention compared to 'relation' as the latter one is obviously present considered by the youth. Autonomy and competence get more critical notes as these are not that obviously present according to the youth. Junior Rangers hope and expect a good, well thought through programme with a learning level that is fitted to their own level. This illustrates that expectations and hope are closely related to experiences of learning. The experience of today will construct expectations for the future, as stated by constructivism theories. Additionally, not one leisure type describes the complete image of the programme and how it is perceived by youth. Only to combine both casual and serious leisure will encompass this leisure situation. Many aspects of (tourism) learning experiences do have similarities with the situation of youth experiencing learning in nature-based activities, but not all aspects do justice to the given setting.

The last but certainly not the least conclusion that is derived from this research on experiences about learning, includes the experience of the actual learned aspects. Specific learned aspects in the programme are the first type of learned aspects. Examples of these are: learning about plants and the usage of them, birds and making fire. The other type of learned aspects are the processes behind conservation and managing a nature park. These describe what rangers do during their daily tasks. The youth describe many different activities that a ranger comes across, but the more specific elements are mentioned far more frequently. Youth experience having both types of learned aspects in the programme as enriching and pleasant, which are not offered anymore in the formal school settings.

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Overall this leads to the conclusion that youth experiences learning in nature-based activities, consciously, as enjoyable and useful, although not always that consciously as they might notice it themselves. When enough room is given to grow in different aspects as developing competence on several levels, building self-esteem, building social skills and relationships and growing in autonomy, learning will be seen as enjoyable and useful. Learning about nature in all aspects of conservation, concerns and actual facts to build a steady base for the relation with the park and nature itself was triggered by intrinsic motivation, but fostered by the programme.

## Recommendations

To validate the outcomes of this research, it would be advisable to extend the research towards other countries or international areas where the Junior Ranger programme is running. An even stronger base would be built when multiple youth programmes with the same goal and set up as the researched programme are included. Furthermore, during this research it was deemed necessary to take multiple theories to cover the whole setting of this research. The existing theories used here, do not fully cover the experiences of youth. Results were partially comparable to the existing used theories, but not all-encompassing. Youth should be seen as a separate group that neither fits within the groups of children or adults. Developing a more encompassing theory that takes on learning experiences of youth in free-choice settings and leisure during nature-based activities, will provide better insight in both the leisure as well as the learning experiences of youth. From the experiences of the researcher as a mentor of Junior Rangers for almost four years, there is no doubt that youth is strongly involved and that they wish more effort is put into youth programmes to aid the conservation of nature. The youth themselves already indicate that there is a demand for more and better nature-programmes to get themselves and others more and deeper involved in nature. In order to do this, more research has to be done on the experiences taken in by youth. The plea that is uttered by the youth themselves reflects the urgency to pay more attention to this group. A group that can and will be the future ambassadors of nature, but only if they are listened to, about how they experience nature, nature activities and the learning process that comes along with the actions and activities undertaken by them. With more thorough, wider and all-encompassing theories on experiences of youth, this can help building a secure future for both youth and nature, in the way they believe it should be. Youth already expresses themselves they want to go back into the wild. In order to facilitate that, we need a better understanding of the experiences and learning processes they embark on.

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## Appendix I: Location National Parks Weerribben-Wieden and Drents-Friese wold



Source: Samenwerkingsverband Nationale Parken

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## Appendix II: Consent form parents/ caretakers (English version)

### Consent form parents/ caretakers

Hereby undersigned declares that researcher S. Visscher from Wageningen University has permission to interview \_\_\_\_\_ concerning the topic of the research with the focus of experiences of youth during leisure activities in a nature-based environment, on order to gain the needed data. The researcher is allowed to use the obtained data to support this research.

I am sufficiently informed concerning the goal of the research and the treatment of the data. I am confident the researcher will do everything that is necessary and to the best of her abilities to make sure confidentially is kept and the data is treated with care and discretion and the recovered data will be anonymously used in this research.

Name parent/ caretaker: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature parent/ caretaker: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Appendix III: Interview guide experts (Dutch)

Allereerst bedankt dat ik jou mag interviewen voor mijn afstudeeronderzoek. Zoals het je misschien al enigszins bekend is, gaat mijn onderzoek over de ervaringen die jongeren hebben als het gaat om leeraspecten tijdens activiteiten in en om de natuur. Ik ben blij dat je onderdeel wilt zijn van dit onderzoek. Het interview zal ongeveer een uur duren.

Ik zal straks eerst wat algemene vragen stellen om zo een compleet en goed mogelijk beeld te krijgen van de jou relatie ten opzichte van de jongeren die betrokken zijn in de activiteiten. Daarna zal ik verschillende vragen stellen over wat jou kijk is ten opzichte van de jongeren en wat jou ervaring is hoe de jongeren leren tijdens de activiteiten en wat zij daar van vinden.

Er bestaan geen goede of slechte antwoorden, het onderzoek gaat over jouw eigen ervaringen met de jongeren en elk antwoord kan hierbij van waarde zijn. Het interview wordt vertrouwelijk behandeld en is compleet anoniem. Mocht je niet meer willen meedoen in het onderzoek, mag je het interview te allen tijde stoppen. Mochten er vragen voorbij komen die je liever niet beantwoordt, is dat natuurlijk mogelijk om aan te geven. Als je het goed vindt, wil ik graag het interview opnemen om zo het interview naderhand zo goed en nauwkeurig mogelijk te kunnen documenteren.

Dan zal ik nu de recorder aanzetten en zal het interview beginnen.

### Algemene vragen:

- Wat is je naam?
- Mag ik je leeftijd daarbij noteren?
- Hoe lang ben je al betrokken bij de Junior Rangers? /Hoe lang betrokken bij de organisatie?
- Hoe ben je betrokken geraakt bij de Junior Rangers?
- Wat is jouw officiële functie binnen de organisatie? Wat houdt deze in?
- Hoe zou je zelf jouw eigen rol binnen het programma omschrijven?

### Beeldvormende vragen in het algemeen:

- Hoe zou je Junior Rangers als organisatie omschrijven?
- Wat zijn volgens jou de kenmerken van het programma van de Junior Rangers?
- Wat is volgens jou kenmerkend aan de jongeren die meedoen aan het Junior Ranger programma?

### Leeraspecten programma

- Wat zijn volgens jou de doelen achter het programma van de Junior Rangers?
- Wat is de visie en missie van de Junior Rangers?
- Kunt u benoemen wat voor leeraspecten u tegenkomt bij de Junior Rangers?
  - o Ontwikkelingen op verschillende gebieden

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### Ervaringen van leren tijdens de activiteiten

- Hoe zou je de Junior Rangers zelf omschrijven?
- Waarom denk je dat jongeren zich aanmelden voor dit programma? Drijfveer, motivatie
- Wat denk je dat de jongeren van de Junior Rangers verwachten?
- Kun je vertellen hoe jij denkt dat jongeren het programma ervaren als ze net beginnen?
- Hoe denk je dat jongeren die al langer mee draaien het programma ervaren?
- Zie je verschillen in de jongeren naarmate ze het programma blijven doorlopen?
- Wat denk je dat jongeren verwachten van de activiteiten en het complete programma als ze net beginnen met het programma?
- Ziet je veranderingen/ (ontwikkelingen) in verwachtingen van jongeren naarmate ze vorderen in het programma?
- Wat zijn de verwachtingen van jongeren die al meerdere jaren in het programma zitten?
- Valt leren ook onder de verwachtingen en hoop?
- Wat denk je dat de jongeren van dit programma leren?
  - o Ontwikkelingen op verschillende gebieden
- Hoe denk jij dat de Junior Rangers zelf kijken naar de dingen die ze leren tijdens de activiteiten?
- in hoeverre denk je dat de jongeren zelf beseffen dat ze tijdens de activiteiten leren?
- Zou je kunnen omschrijven hoe jij denkt dat de jongeren leren tijdens de activiteiten van de Junior Rangers beoordelen?
- Zou je kunnen omschrijven hoe de jongeren verschillende leeraspecten van de activiteiten evalueren, al dan misschien onbewust?

Dit was het einde van het interview, ik wil u nogmaals bedanken dat u mee wilde werken aan mijn onderzoek. Heeft u zelf nog vragen of eventuele aanvullingen die u graag gezegd wilt hebben naar aanleiding van dit interview? Dan zet ik bij deze de recorder af.

