



# The diversity of experiences in nature

By Iris Homan



WAGENINGEN UNIVERSITY  
WAGENINGENUR



# The diversity of experiences in nature

A qualitative research to enhance the visitor  
experiences of Natuurmonumenten nature



<b>Author</b>	Iris Homan
<b>Registration number</b>	910421357040
<b>Thesis Code</b>	GEO 80436
<b>Submission date</b>	13 August 2015
<b>Master Programme</b>	MLE

<b>Chair Group</b>	Cultural Geography
<b>Department</b>	Environmental Sciences
<b>University</b>	Wageningen University
<b>Thesis Supervisor</b>	Henk de Haan
<b>Examiner</b>	Claudio Minca

Cover photo: Natuurmonumenten | Maarten Noordijk



## Summary

In this thesis, the experiences visitors have in nature when recreating outdoors have been studied. This study was a project that was independently researched for the Dutch nature association Natuurmonumenten. The association deals with financial difficulties and is therefore looking for new sources of income. By improving the experiences people currently have during a visit to one of their estates, they want to make people feel more responsible for nature, and connected to Natuurmonumenten. Eventually this must cause an increase in memberships and so, more financial resources. For that reason, the aim of this study was to generate valuable insights in how, where and what tools could be invested to enhance the current recreational visitor experience.

An interpretive research paradigm supported the pragmatic nature of this study to capture a holistic image of the visitor experience. A literature review was used to create the conceptual framework for this research. To study the phenomenon as a whole, the conceptual framework was based on four core categories: the dimensions of the

experience, the recreational activity, the natural setting and stories and events. These four categories were examined using a multiple-case study design, regarding four estates of the association: Zuid-Kennemerland, Planken Wambuis, Heumensoord and Kardingse. Semi-structured interviews, open-ended question surveys, and observations were used to collect the data.

It was concluded that every individual experiences nature differently. However, there seemed to be a division between 'slow' and 'fast' visitors. In all case studies, visitors had satisfying experiences. However, case specific changes could still enhance their recreational experiences. Therefore, Natuurmonumenten was advised to reduce perceived crowding by addressing different segments more effectively and to involve their visitors more. A simple first step would be to provide more information on trails and tailor the routes to the needs of different visitor segments.

**Key words:** *outdoor recreation, experience, nature, Natuurmonumenten*



# Acknowledgements

In front of you lies the result of a seven-month graduate research, conducted to complete the MSc Leisure, Tourism and Environment. The research was executed in cooperation with the Dutch nature association Natuurmonumenten. I am very grateful for all the support and collaboration I received from the association. I therefore hope that the outcomes of this research will contribute to the work of Natuurmonumenten.

The outcomes could also be compelling for (tourism) researchers interested in experiences of outdoor recreationists and in methods for doing qualitative research towards experience. Furthermore, this study can be interesting to other foresters and managers of nature areas who want to know more about how to approach different kinds of recreationists and their experiences.

Writing this thesis would not have been possible without the support and help of different people.

Special thanks go to Henk de Haan for the always-helpful feedback. Secondly, I would like to thank Saskia the Heij (Natuurmonumenten) for her willingness to help me when necessary. My parents, sister and boyfriend also deserve a big thank you for supporting me throughout the whole process, and motivating me to go into the cold research areas many weekends to do the interviews and observations. Furthermore, I want to thank everyone who I have consulted during this research. Finally, I thank all the people who set themselves available for interviews and conversations. Their enthusiasm and willingness to help made it very pleasurable to work on this thesis for the past months.



# Table of contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1. Introduction	2
1.1 Problem description	3
1.2 Research objectives and research questions	5
1.3 The phenomenon of outdoor recreation	6
1.4 Scientific relevance of the study	9
1.5 Structure of the thesis	9
<b>Theoretical framework</b>	<b>10</b>
2. Theoretical framework	11
2.1 Theories and concepts of the visitor experiences	11
2.2 Conceptual framework	26
<b>Methodology</b>	<b>28</b>
3. Research methodology	29
3.1 Methodological considerations	29
3.2 Research design	30
3.3 Methods of data collection	32
3.4 Data Processing	37
3.5 Methodological difficulties	38
<b>Analysing experiences</b>	<b>40</b>
4. Analysing experiences	41
4.1 Case: National Park Zuid-Kennemerland	43
4.2 Case: Planken Wambuis	62
4.3 Case: Heumensoord	74
4.4 Case: Kardingse	88
4.5 Summary of the experience analysis	98
<b>Conclusions and recommendations</b>	<b>100</b>
5. Conclusions and recommendations	101
5.1 Research purpose	101
5.2 Recommendations for future research	109
5.3 Practical recommendations for Natuurmonumenten	110

<b>References</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>Appendix</b>	<b>125</b>
I Info graphic Natuurmonumenten	126
II Literature overview	128
III Interview guide	129
IV Observation and interview locations	133
V Open-ended question survey	137
VI Observation guide	140

# Table of tables and figures

## Figures

Figure 1.1	Relation of management with social and environmental science concerns	8
Figure 2.1	The travel career ladder	15
Figure 2.2	Preference Matrix	19
Figure 2.3	Segmentation based on lifestyles	23
Figure 2.4	Conceptual Framework	27
Figure 3.1	Example lifestyles in a region	31
Figure 3.2	Methods per research question	37
Figure 4.1	Overview of how the research data are presented per case-study	41
Figure 4.2	Overview National Park Zuid-Kennemerland	45
Figure 4.3	Visitor centre ZK	46
Figure 4.4	Touch screen	46
Figure 4.5	Entrance Duin- en Kruidberg	46
Figure 4.6	De Bosuil	47
Figure 4.7	Paths for pedestrians	47
Figure 4.8	Lifestyles surrounding ZK	48
Figure 4.9	Comparing statistics of Zuid-Kennemerland with province of Noord-Holland	49
Figure 4.10	List of available marked trails ZK	57
Figure 4.11	Overview Planken Wambuis	64
Figure 4.12	Observation point	65
Figure 4.13	Part of the signed hiking trail	65
Figure 4.14	Lifestyles surrounding Planken Wambuis	66
Figure 4.15	Biodiversity Planken Wambuis	69
Figure 4.16	Horses in Planken Wambuis	70
Figure 4.17	Complex landscape in Planken Wambuis	70
Figure 4.18	Badly maintained paths in Planken Wambuis	70
Figure 4.19	Route signing on rock	71
Figure 4.20	Route signing on pole	71
Figure 4.21	NM centre Planken Wambuis	72
Figure 4.22	Overview Heumensoord	76
Figure 4.23	Roman sentinel Heumensoord	77
Figure 4.24	Lifestyles surrounding Heumensoord	77
Figure 4.25	Part of map Heumensoord	81
Figure 4.26	Sandpit Heumensoord	82
Figure 4.27	Fire wall Heumensoord	82
Figure 4.28	Information sign forestry works Heumensoord	84
Figure 4.29	Overview Kardingse	90
Figure 4.30	Four mile route Kardingse	91
Figure 4.31	Info panel Plukbossen	91

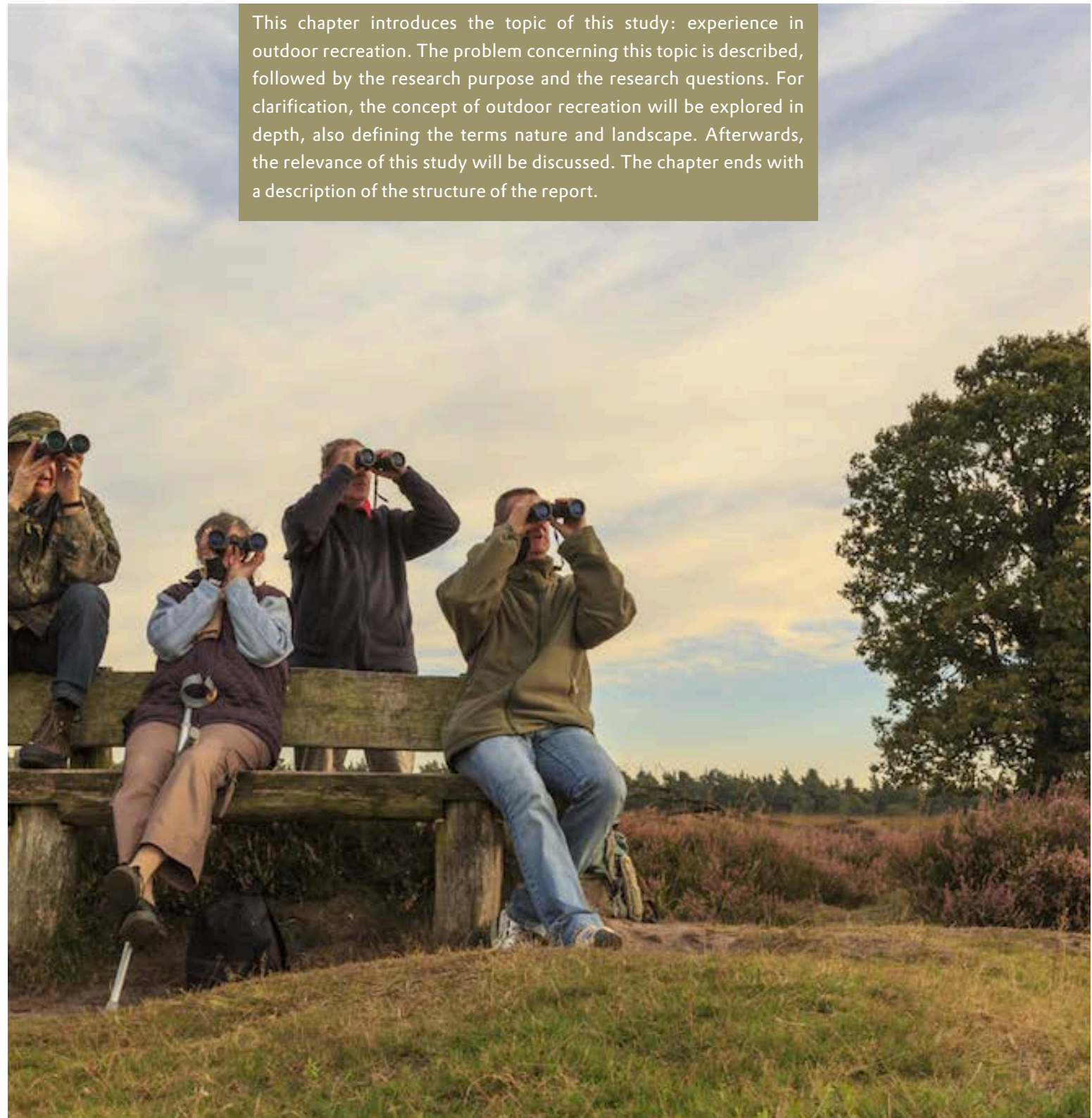
Figure 4.32	Kardinge Mountain	91
Figure 4.33	Kardinge mill and goats	92
Figure 4.34	Maple leaf to honour the Canadian soldier	92
Figure 4.35	Lifestyles surrounding Groningen	92
Figure 4.36	Open field Kardinge	94
Figure 4.37	Yellow climbing wall Kardinge	95
Figure 5.1	Overview of the subjects researched in this thesis and the major assumptions made	102
Figure 5.2	Describing trails	114
 <b>Table</b>		
Table 3.1:	Selection of case studies	32
Table 4.1	Summary of case studies per category	98



# 1

## Introduction

This chapter introduces the topic of this study: experience in outdoor recreation. The problem concerning this topic is described, followed by the research purpose and the research questions. For clarification, the concept of outdoor recreation will be explored in depth, also defining the terms nature and landscape. Afterwards, the relevance of this study will be discussed. The chapter ends with a description of the structure of the report.



# 1. Introduction

The Dutch nature association Natuurmonumenten was founded in 1905, the moment they purchased their first nature area called the Naardermeer. The main task of the organisation was to protect nature, estates and cultural heritage in the Netherlands by purchasing and managing them where possible (Maas, 2005). Although the association has always opened her properties for the public, Natuurmonumenten did not invest a lot in recreation but rather paid attention to maintenance of nature. It was believed that protecting nature could best be done by removing human influences from nature and let nature take its course (Coesèl, Schaminée, & van Duuren, 2007). In the course of the years, the association's tasks slowly developed towards a combination of nature conservation, landscape development and facilitation of outdoor recreation (Maas, 2005). Nowadays Natuurmonumenten possesses 355 nature areas in the Netherlands that cover 100.000 hectares of ground (see Appendix I for a map of the Netherlands with all the properties of Natuurmonumenten). The association has 735.000 people that support the work of Natuurmonumenten, amongst others by collecting and donating (including 643.000 individuals that are members). Natuurmonumenten values the voice of her members greatly and, therefore, aims for transparency.

In the past years it became clear that due to the financial crisis the Dutch government will withdraw her subsidies to Natuurmonumenten in the future. This makes the support of the broader public more critical, increasing the importance of transparency and public involvement even more (Vereniging Natuurmonumenten, 2014). This development is one of the main reasons for including nature and recreation - 'connect people and nature' - as one of the three main themes in the newly developed vision for 2040 (van Tooren & de Graeff, 2012, p.13, translation by author) (elaborated argumentation is described in the paragraphs below). Outdoor recreation and experiences in nature are of great importance for the implementation of this new vision. For the past years, the association has put a lot of effort in getting satisfied visitors<sup>1</sup>, for example by the creation of children's playgrounds in nature and by building visitor centres in different popular nature areas (Natuurmonumenten, 2014b; 2014j). Nowadays visitors are very positive about the properties of the association. Natuurmonumenten, however, wants to get her visitors even more involved in nature; increasing the perceived value and importance of protecting and maintaining nature. Therefore, recently a significant step towards the improvement of the recreational visitor experience was taken by asking the grassroots of Natuurmonumenten to think along about 'experiencing nature': what could Natuurmonumenten do to make the experience in nature even more enjoyable (for survey see: Natuurmonumenten, 2014d)? With the outcomes of this survey, a recreation agenda was developed (Heij, 2014). The agenda describes seven themes including priorities for plans concerning the experiences in nature. These plans, however, are abstract and must be concretised further. This concretisation is about establishing a link between the creation of the positive visitor experiences on the one hand, and the way the properties are designed, managed and maintained on the other hand. Nowadays everyone has his/her individual preference of a favourite experience in nature. Whether it is walking, biking, boating, bird watching, climbing trees or just doing nothing. For that reason, this research aims to establish an advice that includes concrete lines of policy on how to realize those favourite experiences in nature. This research will be done by looking at current trends in recreation, landscape design and by inventorying the experiences visitors currently have when visiting the properties of Natuurmonumenten.

---

<sup>1</sup> People who recreate outdoors, visiting the properties of Natuurmonumenten.

## 1.1 Problem description

In the past years, the association increasingly realised that the relation between humans and nature is of critical importance. This means that Natuurmonumenten wants to get her visitors more and more involved in nature, increasing their feelings of responsibility and letting them become more active in protecting and maintaining nature themselves. The arguments for this shift in strategy are:

### **Four reasons for investing in a better relation between humans and nature**

1. Increased apprehension within Natuurmonumenten that an important element of the interaction between humans and nature concerns the experiences visitors have when they recreate in the Natuurmonumenten properties.
2. Need for additional financial means.
3. Challenges in managing outdoor recreation due to the large number of visitors with different interests.
4. Shifting governmental focus from an ecological focus to a combination of an ecological and societal focus.

The paragraphs below elaborate on the above four points in more detail.

1. Natuurmonumenten assumes that investments in the improvement of the visitor experiences will turn out as a solution for the problems described in the introduction. There are several arguments for committing to this ambitious plan. Firstly, the Dutch value nature but their general perception of nature management is that it will be arranged for them (S. de Heij, personal communication, October 6, 2014). When creating a more satisfying visitor experience, people will start to love nature more, and develop more feelings more of responsibility for nature. Natuurmonumenten expects that enhancing visitor's experiences in nature can result in more memberships and donations from visitors. Furthermore, people who can recall a satisfying experience remember the positive values of the visit for a long time. According to Bell (2008) this is essential to persuade the visitor to return and tell his or her friend to come. In this way, more people can become more familiar with the work of Natuurmonumenten, increasing the chance of more (financial) support for the association. Investing in recreational experiences is also an opportunity for Natuurmonumenten to react to the current affluent society, where developed countries become more prosperous, and people have higher average income. Accordingly, people can spend more of their income on leisure and recreation activities since economies mature and people already possess most of the tangible consumer products. They start to desire intangible products such as natural experiences, often gained through leisure and recreation (Bell, et al., 2007). In summary, there is a lot to gain by improving the visitor's experience. Yet, the benefits of enhanced visitor experiences will not be gained until the right investments are made. The association adopted extra attention to visitor experiences in her new vision for 2040 (van Tooren & de Graeff, 2012). It is, however, still unclear for them how, where and with what tools they should invest. Therefore, this research responds to the request of Natuurmonumenten to explore investments that will improve the visitors' recreational experiences at properties of Natuurmonumenten.

2. Improving the visitor experience in outdoor recreation in the properties of Natuurmonumenten is not an easy task and includes many facets. The initiative for drawing up the ambitious recreation agenda testifies the willingness to solve the current problems Natuurmonumenten. As discussed in the first paragraph of this chapter, the main concern of the association is the urgent need for more financial resources. There are currently 250 animals on the red list in the Netherlands, which means



that they will be extinct in the country within 20 to 30 years if no action is undertaken to protect them. Natuurmonumenten feels responsible for decreasing this number, as the primary goal of the association is to safeguard nature. The association values a viable environment in the Netherlands with enough space for continuation of nature in all its manifestations (Bergman & Shroder, 1999; Coesèl, et al., 2007). Extra funds are needed to be able to fulfil the requirements of the Natura-2000 areas<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, costs for the repair and the maintenance of nature have risen, necessitating the needs for extra financial resources.

Another reason for the need of additional financial means is that next to the withdrawal of the government subsidies, Dutch municipalities feel less responsible for nature conservation. In 2011, Henk Bleker, the Dutch state secretary of business economics, agriculture, and innovation, introduced a new nature policy of the country, amongst others putting an end to the aspiration to reconnect nature areas in the Netherlands. Also, the twelve Dutch provinces had to become responsible for the nature policy in their areas while the government provided a smaller budget for each of the provinces due to cutbacks. Each province has less money available for nature conservation, which now leads to fewer investments in the prevention of the endangering of animals and plants. Natuurmonumenten feels responsible to undertake action when there is a lack of nature conservation because of these parties. This will bring extra costs and the association, therefore, needs more financial means. According to Gartner and Lime (2000) the need for more financial resources is not only a Dutch trend but also appears among public land managers worldwide.

3. Apart from the general change in strategic focus and financial concerns, there is a third argument for focussing on the enhancement of the visitor's experience. Despite the fact that Natuurmonumenten is happy with the big interest of visitors in her properties, recreationists also bring challenges. Given the increasing numbers of visitors, it becomes more and more difficult to protect the integrity of park resources, and maintain the essential character and spirit of the place. Many nature managers have to face these challenges nowadays (Bell, 2008; Bell, et al., 2009; Gartner & Lime, 2000; Kaplan, Kaplan, & Ryan, 1998; Manning & Anderson, 2012).

4. Buijs (2009) stresses a fourth reason for the importance of visitors' experiences. The nature policy on the national level in the Netherlands is shifting from an ecological focus to a combination of an ecological and a societal focus. This change in emphasis was caused by social conflicts, which emerged from projects of the Dutch government that only focused on the physical conservation and rehabilitation of nature (LNV, 1990). It is no longer possible to protect and develop nature independently of the society at large. Therefore, the recent nature policy of the government included the social values of nature and the (recreational) demands of the public (LNV, 2000; Ministerie van Economische Zaken, 2014). In these policies, the importance of combining nature quality with user quality and the quality of experiences is emphasised. However, taking those public needs into account and engaging the public actively is not an easy task. For instance trends like globalisation, digitalisation influence on the requirements and expectations of recreationists. Furthermore, the concept of 'the' recreationist does not exist anymore. Everyone has different needs. Who nowadays wants to understand the behaviour and the wishes of the recreationist cannot just look at the demographical aspects such as age, gender, income, and family phase anymore. Of course these aspects are still important, but they explain less and less of the actual needs of the recreationist (SmartAgent, 2012a). It is no longer the case that people who have more to spend, visit the luxury restaurants, and the ones with less income eat in simple café restaurants. Nowadays, recreationists

---

<sup>2</sup> A number of Natuurmonumenten properties have an international status. These areas belong to Natura2000, the European network for valuable nature. These areas have bird directive (because of the presence of a special bird species) and / or habitat directive (because of the presence of a special ecological communities and species) (Afdeling Natuur en Landschap, 2012).

make choices based on wishes, motives and interests (SmartAgent, 2012a). Natuurmonumenten realises that nature and society need to work together. The association greatly values the voices of its members and wants to find ways to respond to the changing wishes and needs of the recreationists. Therefore, Natuurmonumenten needs to find a new approach to keeping her members satisfied.

In summary, Natuurmonumenten is willing to invest in enhancing the recreational experiences in nature for her visitors. This investment is regarded as a possible solution to the need for more financial resources, finding an appropriate balance between recreation and protection, and fulfilling the changing wishes and needs of her members. Paying more attention to visitor experiences is deemed to be an important vehicle for the future policy. For Natuurmonumenten, the findings of this study can help to understand the characteristics and expectations of her visitors and their recreational experiences in nature better. Also, it can function as a guide to operationalize satisfactory nature experiences in the Natuurmonumenten properties.

The scientific relevance of this study will be explained in paragraph 1.4. However, first, the research objectives and research questions will be discussed, followed by an in-depth look at outdoor recreation and the visitor experience.

## 1.2 Research objectives and research questions

Given the problem description above, now the research objective can be formulated. The main purpose of this study is to acquire knowledge that can generate valuable insights in how, where and with what tools could be invested to enhance the current recreational visitor experience. This investment is essential for Natuurmonumenten in order to overcome the problems stated above. The knowledge acquired in this research can be used to underpin the current recreation policy of Natuurmonumenten.

Given this research objective, the following research question can be formulated:

*How can Natuurmonumenten enhance the recreational visitor experiences of the people who recreate at her properties?*

This question can be answered by elaborating on the following sub questions (SQ).

SQ 1: What is the recreational visitor experience?

SQ 2: What are the site characteristics?

SQ 3: What is the connection between the site characteristics and the recreational visitor experience?

SQ 4: How can the knowledge about recreational visitor experience, site characteristics and current trends contribute to the improvement of the future recreational visitor experiences?

## 1.3 The phenomenon of outdoor recreation

Chapter two discusses the theoretical framework for this research. To be able to construct a theoretical framework concerning experiences in outdoor recreation, it is important to first explore some theoretical notions of the phenomenon of outdoor recreation. Therefore, this section provides a discussion of the phenomenon outdoor recreation and its characteristics in the Netherlands.

Outdoor recreation goes back to the mediaeval ages when kings and aristocrats took part in hunting parties. In the eighteenth-century rich people embarked on Grand Tours, but it was not until the nineteenth-century outdoor recreation developed for the broader middle-classes (Bell, et al., 2009). According to *Oxford Dictionary*, the word 'recreation' comes via Old French from the Latin '*recreare*' (create again, renew); an activity done for enjoyment when one is not working. Jenkins and Pigram (2006) describe outdoor recreation as a phenomenon portraying recreation that occurs outdoors in, for example, urban and rural or terrestrial and marine environments. Bell, et al. (2007) refer to outdoor recreation as 'activities that people undertake out of doors in a place where they can access nature or green areas, mainly as a part of their daily or weekend routines' (p.6). 'It includes the solitary, such as a person going for a walk by themselves or the gregarious, such as a large family picnic or a group of friends going on a hike' (p.5). Bell (2008) emphasises that outdoor recreation includes 'activities that are carried out not far from home' (p.1). This brief analysis of various definitions of outdoor recreation shows that outdoor recreation combines the notion of *activities* with *being outdoors* – away from home, but close to home. Some authors stress the element of nature as the central feature, which will also be the focus of this research. Based on the discussion above, this thesis adopts the following definition of outdoor recreation: 'recreational activities that are carried out in a natural setting or otherwise involving in some direct way elements of nature - not far from home'.

Outdoor recreation includes a range of activities from the very passive, such as sitting, relaxing, photographing or enjoying a view, to the very active, such as mountain biking or horse riding, golf and swimming. Through outdoor recreation, people can explore natural and cultural environments and become more familiar with them. Simultaneously, they gain a greater appreciation of landscapes and ecosystems (Jenkins & Pigram, 2006).

### Defining nature and landscape

Nature is a very broad concept that can be defined in different ways. What people define as 'nature' also has been a topic of inquiry in itself: for example, what do people see as nature and what not? Or what makes nature valuable for people and what does it mean for them (i.e. Manning, 2010)? Experienced natural values appear to be very personal, and, therefore, it is assumed that the definition of 'nature' mainly is an individual definition. For policy measures, however, this is no suitable definition to work with. An individual interpretation of the concept of nature does not allow detecting temporal changes and perceptions of nature. In the governmental nature policy of the Netherlands nature is seen as something 'of the front door to the North Sea'. This is consistent with the experience of most people for whom the distinction of nature, biodiversity and landscape is relative (LNV, 2000).

Nature is often confused with the term landscape. The definition of landscape is narrower than the definition of nature and is related to the visual angle. The different descriptions of landscape in academic literature can be summarised in 'everything that can be seen in one eye view within the viewshed' (Bell, 2008; Henderson & Vikander, 2007; Jacks, 2007; Kaplan, et al., 1998). As Smith (2003) agrees 'the prominent features of a landscape include geological formations, such as mountains,



plains, rivers, coastlines, and water bodies, as well as land covers, such as trees, shrubs, and grasses' (p.274). A landscape also includes built forms such as roads and buildings. Many landscape typologies can be found in literature, for example, distinguishing the natural or wilderness landscape from the more artificial landscape such as the urban cities. Natuurmonumenten divides landscape into the natural and the cultural landscape. The association uses the concept of landscape in a very broad sense indicating 'areas with their own visual identity, as a bearer of a great diversity of communities, flora and fauna, as well places where the history of cultural heritage, of its own past, and as an area where the local and the regional can recreate, to silence, peace and health' (Van Tooren & De Graeff, 2012, p.13).

In the context of the visitor experience, the term 'area' also is a concept that often occurs in studies and reports. When can we call something an 'area' as used in the context of natural experiences? Does this include a street with trees on both sides and little gardens with tiles? For outdoor recreation, the term is used in a different way. Kaplan, Kaplan and Ryan (1998), for instance, present convincing evidence that people have a higher preference for 'areas' with natural elements, than areas with more human-influenced attributes. For this study, all 'loose' natural elements are therefore left behind. Another possibility is to define an area by size. Yet, some outdoor recreational activities, such as sitting and enjoying the sun, do not require that much space. When looking deeper into the 'experience' of nature, it is required that there is a dominance of nature present in the area. We do not speak of the 'nature experience' of the trees in a street or the 'nature experience' of the little gardens in front of the houses. Thus, the possibility to experience 'natural', not man-made nature is distinctive for the use of the term 'area' in the context of visitor experience (de Vries, 2009).

### Outdoor recreation in the Netherlands

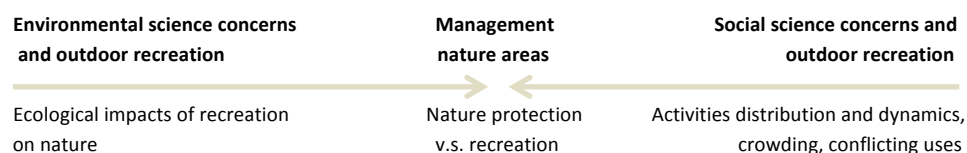
The Dutch have approximately 45 free hours during one week (SmartAgent, 2012c). Between 2010 and 2011, 98,6 percent of the Dutch spent approximately 18 of these hours outdoors (de Bruijn, et al., 2012). The frequency with which different outdoor activities are undertaken, strongly depends on the type of activity. The most popular cluster of activities in the Netherlands is outside recreational activities, followed by sportive activities on the second place and recreational shopping on the third place. The least popular clusters of the Dutch are beauty and wellness and visiting sports games (de Bruijn, et al., 2012). Every cluster of activities exists of a range of distinguishable activities. Within the outside recreational cluster the most popular activity is walking for enjoyment (de Bruijn, et al., 2012; SmartAgent, 2012c).

As the Netherlands is densely populated, crowding in nature areas is a common. Crowding involves 'both an impact (the number of people) and a value judgement (the number of people that is too many for a certain type of experience)' (Whittaker & Whittaker, 2003, p.90). Crowding is a subjective phenomenon and situation specific. Whittaker & Whittaker (2003) explain this statement by a clarifying example of a beach. When a beach is one kilometre long and could physically accommodate thousands of people, visitors may label it as uncrowded when only hundred people are present. However, if the beach was in a remote setting, visitors may even feel crowded when only ten other visitors are present at the beach. Manning & Anderson (2012) also point at individual differences in perceiving crowding. This perception can be influenced by the personal characteristics of the visitors such as previous experiences and motivations, but also characteristics of other encounters such as group size and perceived similarity, as well as the situation variables, that include the type of area being visited. Manning and Valliere (2001) even suggest that the visitors that are so dissatisfied with people who encounter large numbers of visitors may ultimately be replaced by visitors who are not as sensitive to increased use levels. In this way, the number of people present in the area continues to increase while visitor satisfaction continues to be high.

When we look at the role Natuurmonumenten plays in outdoor recreational activities, roughly estimated, 50 million people visit the Natuurmonumenten properties per year (Vereniging Natuurmonumenten, 2014). The large number of visitors caused a change in the strategic orientation of the association. In the first half of the twentieth century the strategic emphasis was on the preservation of different types of natural areas, focussing on nature management activities such as sowing, burning and mowing, which were deemed necessary for maintaining the nature quality. Until the early nineteen hundreds, a fee of ten cents per adult was asked for entering the properties. This strategic emphasis changed when Natuurmonumenten purchased more nature, and – parallel to this – the interest for outdoor recreation increased due to the industrial revolution. Nature developed into a product, which was not only promoted greatly by Natuurmonumenten but also by other Dutch tourist organisations such as the VVV's and the ANWB. Soon the association started to see the impact of the many visitors on the nature quality and had to close several areas to save them from devastation. The people who work at the terrains of Natuurmonumenten became hosts for the recreationists. Foresters, for example, were (and still are) not only in the position of nature protector anymore but also had to stop undesirable behaviour of visitors. Furthermore, in 1970 the first visitor centre was built to make visitors aware of how urgent the work of the association is, and make people willing to support Natuurmonumenten financially. This all leads to the conclusion of Natuurmonumenten that 'a vision on nature and landscape must also be a vision on the relation between human and nature' (van Tooren & de Graeff, 2012).

### Studies in outdoor recreation

Outdoor recreation studies are commonly divided into environmental science concerns (e.g. van der Zande, et al., 1984) and social science concerns (e.g. Muderrisoglu, et al., 2013). Environmental science concerns in relation to outdoor recreation primarily involve the ecological impact of recreation on nature. On the other hand, social science concerns in relation to outdoor recreation focuses on humans, their activities, distribution and dynamics. This also includes issues such as crowding and conflicting uses, elements that can influence the visitor experience. Environmental and social science concerns are interrelated and, therefore, need an interdisciplinary perspective (Manning, 2010). Also, management of nature areas assembles both as it tries to find a balance between the protection and maintenance of nature and recreation (figure 1.1).



*Figure 1.1 Relation of management with social and environmental science concerns.*

In spite of the interrelatedness, this thesis is focussed on the social science aspects of outdoor recreation, as the attention is more on the interaction between humans and nature and the relationships among individuals rather than on the ecological impacts of recreation. Social sciences include a range of other disciplinary perspectives such as sociology, political science, psychology, anthropology and economics.

## 1.4 Scientific relevance of the study

Outdoor recreation research is relatively scant in many European countries, Australia and New Zealand, as compared to North America. Most research publications on outdoor recreation research projects in North America (for example, Bell, 2008; Jensen & Guthrie, 2005; Gartner & Lime, 2000; Manning & Anderson, 2012). According to Jenkins and Pigram (2006) this is because especially in the US, outdoor recreation is a prominent field of interest for government agencies, research programmes and university curricula. Only a small amount of research in this field has been undertaken in Europe. Relevant European publications mainly concern studies on population pressure and limited nature resources, with a concentration on studies about the most urbanized countries such as the UK and the Netherlands (i.e. Bell, et al., 2007; de Vries, 2009). Specific research on visitor experience in Europe is missing in spite of there being a high demand for research on this theme (Bell, et al., 2009). As this study is focusing on visitor experiences in the Netherlands, it could provide a good first step in response to this demand.

Characteristic for the existing research on outdoor activities is its quantitative perspective, using surveys for studying frequencies of visits and recreational activities. The disadvantage of this kind of survey-research is that the underlying meanings the outdoor activities have for participants remain unexplained. For that reason, several more qualitative approaches in leisure studies have been tested to identify the variations in underlying meanings of visitor activities (i.e. Henderson & Vikander, 2007). Using qualitative methods these authors discovered that outdoor recreational activities often are carried out either to learn and improve one's outdoor skills, or as an escape from urban speedy life and stress to 'detox' the mind and regain strength. Henderson and Vikander explain these meanings of outdoor activities as a typical consequence of the postmodern society. Given the fact that the majority of the research on outdoor recreation is of a quantitative nature, in this thesis, a qualitative research approach is adopted. This thesis can provide additional insights to existing qualitative research results because of its use of a different set of qualitative research methods.

A final argument for the scientific relevance of this research project has to do with the increasing problems of crowding in nature estates. The trend that more people want to visit existing pieces of nature leads to visitors' experiencing nuisances of each other (Bergman & Shroder, 1999). This same phenomenon occurs at the properties of Natuurmonumenten (van Tooren & de Graeff, 2012). In this thesis, explicit attention is paid to crowding and the way in which it is experienced (or not). In this way this research can contribute to the knowledge on this relatively new and emerging phenomenon.

## 1.5 Structure of the thesis

The report is built up in the following way. In this chapter, an introduction to the research was given. The next chapter, chapter two, discusses the theoretical framework that elaborates the notions of the visitor experience, outdoor recreation activities, the natural setting and the role of narratives. The conceptual framework is also introduced in this chapter and will function as the theoretical backbone of the study. Chapter three explains the methodology of the research: the methods used, their limitations and the research process. In this research, a qualitative approach is applied, using interviews, observations and online open-ended question surveys to collect data. In chapter four, the results of this research are presented. It was not possible to create a representative sample of the properties of Natuurmonumenten because of its scale. For that reason, four case studies were chosen. This chapter is divided into four sections, each of them presenting a different case study. Finally, the report closes with conclusions and recommendations for Natuurmonumenten in chapter five.



# 2

## Theoretical Framework

This chapter reviews the relevant theoretical and empirical literature on the phenomenon of the recreational visitor experience. Concepts and theories that contribute to answering the research questions are presented and explained. At the end of this chapter a conceptual framework is proposed in which relations are specified between the relevant concepts.



## 2. Theoretical framework

This chapter looks into the relevant concepts and theories of the recreational visitor experience in outdoor recreation, based on empirical research using secondary data. At the end of the chapter, it is explained how the discussed concepts and theories relate to each other in the form of a conceptual model.

### 2.1 Theories and concepts of the visitor experience

After consulting the relevant literature about outdoor recreation and experiencing nature, it can be concluded that the natural environment can be researched in objective (positivistic) as well as in subjective (interpretive) ways. Objective measurements focus on properties that are able to predict behaviour such as landmarks, nodes and routes. Subjective measures are concerned with the ways in which individuals (subjectively) experience their natural environment, the subjective quality.

It was found that literature defining and describing the links between the visitor experience and nature is complex and contested. Researchers look at this topic from many different angles, which makes it hard to study this phenomenon as a whole. As Gelter (2011) argues, 'there have been many attempts in different fields such as psychology, philosophy, education, anthropology, sociology, marketing, tourism, outdoor education, medical research, ICTL, etc. to grasp the qualities of the human experience' (p.229). Each approach uses particular theoretical constructs and applies different research methods. This makes it a challenge to completely grasp the concept of 'experience' and its context. It is not the goal of this thesis to create such a holistic integrated framework. In order to be able to approach and study of the recreational experience in nature, I chose to adopt the components that most regularly seem to occur in academic literature concerning human experiences and recreation in nature. It was possible to identify some points of consensus, which are discussed in the sections below. Given the explorative character and the holistic approach of this research, there was chosen to include different variables in this research instead of focussing on one variable. This also gave the opportunity to be as open as possible for the interviewee's of this research. In this way they were not restricted to certain topics, but were able to tell almost any story they wanted.

#### The recreational experience

Outdoor recreation is more than just free time or a freely chosen activity. It rather needs to be seen as those elements together constituting the outdoor experience. In this thesis, the terms outdoor experience, experience, visitor experience and recreational experience are used interchangeably. The concept of the 'visitor experience' is designated to focus attention on the experiences of people visiting natural environments, properties and estates, where these people are 'visitors' of those venues. The concept of the visitor experience is studied in tourism and leisure, as well as in recreational studies. The word 'experience' can refer to two different states. Firstly it can refer to the moment-by-moment lived experience. The second state involves the evaluated experience (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010). Most research is focused on the second state, where the research interest is focussed on the reflection on the recreational activity (usually when this activity is finished) and its perceived meaning. According to Brown (2003) a recreational experience is commonly defined as 'the realizations of outcomes from participation in recreation activities in specific places' (p.419). Driver (2003) and Rodríguez (2011) argue that a rewarding experience finds its source in voluntary engagement during a time of choice. So there should not be any internal or external pressure when engaging in a leisure activity. Not everyone looks for the same experiences, or wants to be involved in the same activities when they visit a natural area (Newsome, Moore, & Dowling, 2013). Furthermore,

experiences are influenced by the kind of recreation activity and the setting in which they occur (Manning, 2010). Cutler & Carmichael (2010) further elaborate on this by stating that on-site experiences are a result of an interaction between visitors and destinations. Here the destinations play a passive role and the visitors are placed in the role of 'actors'. Choice, freedom and desire, play an important role when trying to understand this concept.

Other authors argue that the phenomenon of the visitor experience should be conceptualised as the amount of pleasure someone is having in nature. Best (2010), for example, argues that pleasure is a feeling that is experienced as a consequence of satisfying physical, emotional and/or intellectual gratification. Bingé, Gnoth, & Andreu (2008) add that pleasure 'reflects the degree to which consumers feel good or happy with the surrounding environment' (p.163). In these conceptualisations of the visitor experience, individuals are assumed to evaluate their experience as the judgement of the total amount of pleasure they had. As suggested by Bell (2008), the experience can vary greatly from setting to setting. In nature areas, conflicts between users occur because individuals want to realise different recreational experiences. As recreational experiences occur at a subjective individual level, they are a complex phenomenon to research. This complexity especially has to do with the many influencing variables and processes that are involved in the emergence of subjective experiences. For example, individuals are influenced amongst others by social contexts as well as their personality, position in life-cycle and their gender (Driver, 2003; Manning, 2010). Whether a particular experience constitutes a satisfying experience, is, therefore, a highly subjective judgement, which can potentially be influenced by a whole array of causal factors. One of the other causal factors involves cultural characteristics. Even though cultural characteristics go beyond the scope of this thesis, it is worth mentioning them in this section. In different cultures, different views exist on the use of nature. The literature study of Buijs and de Vries (2005), for example, shows that Non-western immigrants are less attracted by the Dutch landscape as they have never experienced something similar in their past. The meaning they give to nature as well as their recreation behaviour strongly differs from the autochthone visitors.

### **The concept of flow**

Another theoretical angle to approach the phenomenon of the recreational experience is taken by Hayllar (2003) who introduces the concept of 'flow' of experience. With the concept of flow, this author describes a positive experience where action and awareness merge into a mental state in which a person performing an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energised focus, full involvement, and enjoyment in the process of the activity. In essence, flow is characterised by a complete absorption in what one does. When this merging of experience and action happens, an enjoyable and focused concentration will appear and one is less self-conscious and self-aware (Cohen, 2010). Even more important, as Schouten, McAlexander and Koenig (2007) argue, 'flow produces a state of transcendence, a suspension of temporal reality, a sense of separation from the mundane, and a sense of unity with some higher plane of experience' (p.357). These transcendent experience have the power to shape or influence the attitudes and behaviours of visitors. This phenomenon was first articulated by M. Csikszentmihalyi in his work *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety* (1975) where he tried to understand the nature of enjoyment. Gelter (2000) explains the necessity of flow when doing a mental and a physical task at the same time, the body and the mind need to be able to harmonise. When this 'harmonisation' happens, the tiredness experienced after such a task is perceived as a great pleasure, no matter how fatiguing the activity itself was.

At the moment an individual is in a flow-state, he/she feels in control of his/her own actions and feels little distinction between the self and the environment; the (subjectively experienced) 'right' things are done without thinking. This requires, however, a match between the level of skill and the degree



of challenge by the task. For example, when an activity is too challenging for an individual it will cause an unsatisfactory experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). The concept of flow is used in several studies that have attempted to understand the visitor experience from that perspective (i.e. Ewert, 1994). Pomfret (2006) presents a highly illustrative case study illustrating how mountaineer adventure tourists reached that optimal psychological state because of the coming together of skills and challenges and being able to become so involved in the activity that nothing else seems to matter.

Manning (2010) looks at experience from a different perspective. He introduces the concept of 'recreation specialisation', reflected by equipment and skills used in the recreation activity showing differences among recreationists. A recreationist who has little knowledge of the recreation activity and the setting in which it occurs may have different attitudes, preferences and behaviour than someone who is an advanced recreationist and who has a greater knowledge base (for instance a mountain biker who has used a trail in the woods many times and exactly knows his way). Also Rodríguez (2011) emphasises the theoretical relevance of the level of competence. In order to gain a pleasurable experience, there must be some sense of a reward that can be obtained. He argues that competence is the most important reward as it allows one to increase feelings of 'being in control' and 'knowing what is happening' and thus becoming more engaged in the activities 'on' which the competence is developed. Empirical studies (i.e. Manning, 2010) show that highly specialised visitors (visitors that have a high frequency in attending a certain activity, mastering the right skills and having the right equipment) tend to report significantly higher levels of crowding<sup>3</sup> than less specialised visitors, and have more highly developed preferences. Other studies (i.e. Hinds & Sparks, 2008) found that there are differences in attitudes towards the natural environment by specialisation level. More frequent visits cause more actions in pro-environmental behaviour, such as recycling, becoming energy efficient and support environmental organisations financially.

This section started by exploring the recreational experience and provided an overview of the different ways this phenomenon is conceptualised. The following sections explore the *dimensions* of the recreational experience, keeping this definition in mind.

### Dimensions of the experience

The way landscapes are experienced is a result of the action and interaction of natural and human factors (Pellitero, 2011). The interaction between natural and human factors is the subject of many academic publications (see Appendix II). In these publications, theories are developed to explore, describe and predict the subjective experience of landscapes. Also suggestions are given for the ways the research results can be implemented in landscape planning and management. However, there is no overall theory to be found that integrally explains the visitor experience. Yet, there are several concepts or dimensions of experiences that keep returning in the studies that try to capture the dimensions that are involved with the visitor experience. The dimensions described below are most commonly referred to in the literature.

#### Environmental perception

'Environmental perception refers to the process whereby humans organize and interpret elements of their environment into a meaningful picture of their world or life-space' (Pigram, 2003b, p.359). Why people select a particular natural environment depends on the subjective interaction of the available opportunities in a natural environment, personal values, past experiences, expectations, and needs. The concrete experiences someone has in a specific natural environment is a result of all these factors

---

<sup>3</sup> Crowding involves the number of people present in an area and the number of people that is too much for a certain experience (Whittaker & Whittaker, 2003). See introduction chapter for a more detailed description of crowding.

'operating' together being evoked in and by a specific recreational area's situation (Pigram, 2003b). Another major factor influencing the experience of the visitor is motivation. Larsen (2007) argues that conceptually the experience someone has of nature comes close to the concept of meaning, in the sense of the meaning which a person gives to an outdoor recreational activity. The 'visitors' experience'; the meaning that the visitor attaches to his or her outdoor activity has a strong evaluative component: did I like it?, was I satisfied with my visit?, and so on. This evaluation is the result of a comparison of on the one-hand expectations and motivations and on the other hand the degree these motivations and expectations are met during the recreational activity. Much literature on the visitor experience highlights the importance of motivation in relation to the overall experiences of a natural destination. 'Motivation is understood as the personal factors which influence the overall assessment of travel' (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010, p.11). Studies about motivations have generally approached the topic by listing reasons why people recreate. An older study concerning visitor motivations (the needs someone aspires to satisfy) showed that motivations for outdoor recreation include rest and relaxation, association with friends and family, physical exercise, learning experience and self-fulfilment (Guinn, 1980). Furthermore in this research, Guinn indicated that there are significant relationships between motivations and selected active and sedentary leisure activities, age, occupation and income. No link could be found between motivations and educational level. A more recent study by Beh & Bruyere (2007) divided visitor needs in three categories comprising specific 'configurations' of needs, namely escapists, learners and spiritualists. Goossen and Donders (2011) defined five needs which stimulate people to recreate outdoors. These needs are to socialise (in Dutch: 'voor de gezelligheid'), to get out, because of a certain interest, to get fully immersed into another world, and the desire to be challenged. It is interesting to observe that across a period of time several studies showed different needs (keeping in mind that the aforementioned studies did not use the exact same methods of data collection). This could indicate that visitors' needs are changing over time. Pearce (1991) introduces a useful model of tourist motivation; the travel career ladder. Even though his model is focused on tourism, it also seems suitable for leisure and recreation. The model is based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs showing that there is a hierarchy in needs (figure 2.1). It indicates that needs on 'lower levels on the ladder usually have to be satisfied before the person moves to higher levels of the ladder' (González & Bello, 2002, p.54). As González and Bello (2002) further explain: in this model, the different destinations also include different experiences. The selection of the destination, transport and activities depends on their lifestyles and need profile.

Needs can be divided into push- and pull factors according to the push-pull model of G. M. S. Dann (1981). Pull factors are associated with the attributes of the destination, offering certain activities or the imagery of the landscape. Push factors are related to desire and provide a reason for leaving home, such as an escape from the busy life and the daily routine (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). In this approach, Gelter (2011) argues that 'among pull factors, the concept of the 'tourist gaze' (Urry, 2002) has been very influential in approaching the tourist experience in a visual context, suggesting that people travel to destinations that are striking visually' (p.234). The satisfaction of the experience based on the push and pull factors contribute to the destination loyalty.

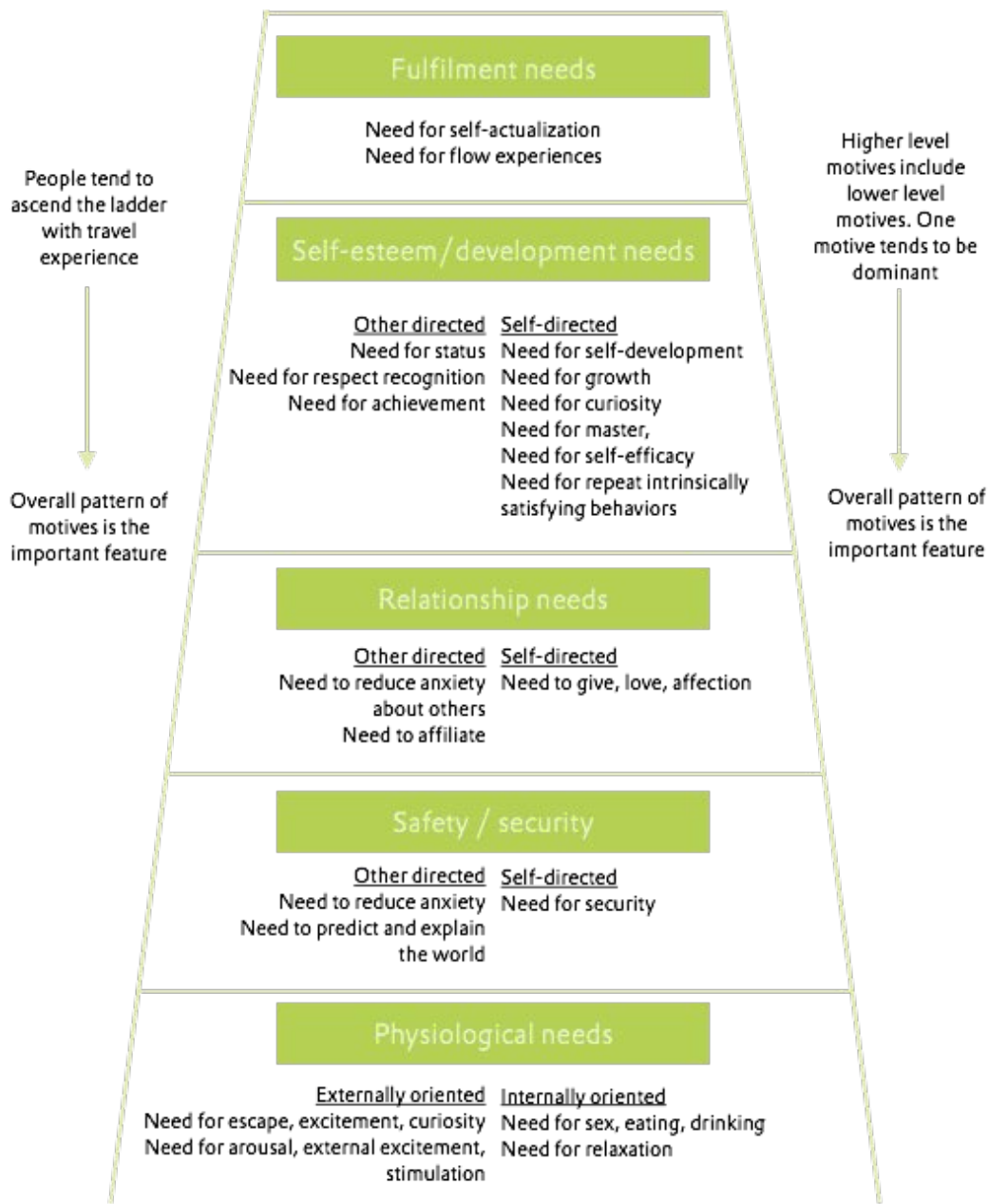


Figure 2.1 The Travel career ladder (Pearce, 1991)

Understanding why people select a specific area, helps to explain why certain activities and sites are favoured while others neglected (Pigram, 2003b). When an individual receives the wrong information or misses out on information, one can have a biased image of the area, leading to decisions to visit or not visit a certain nature estate, based on the wrong information. Perceptions and preferences can also change over time. For example, Manning & Anderson (2012) and Muderrisoglu, et al. (2013) describe that an increasing number of users of a natural area influence the visitor experience (e.g. perceiving the area as being too crowded). The visitor may undertake alternative activities to avoid the crowd or start looking for other natural areas.

#### Focus of attention

Knopf (1987) notes that 'when people experience nature in leisure settings, they are not simply responding to a collection of physical attributes' (p.403). Instead, they are involved in a transactional process in which the natural setting and the personal characteristics contribute to the meaning of the

event. This person-environment transaction can be divided into five modes. A mode describes the dominant focus in the experience. These five modes are: focus on nature as an object or place; focus on self and internal thoughts; focus on others; focus on emotions and affect; and focus on task or activity. People that practice activities in a group settings tend to focus rather on the mode of 'others', the social setting rather than the natural setting. People that enjoy nature alone often come in modes that focus on the self and internal thoughts. Also, people that experience amazement, awe and wonder in nature, for example, by spotting a certain animal or an impressive view often experience a nature focus. When an environment presents an obstacle that needs to be overcome, the focus is often on the task or activity. At any moment during the recreational experience, one or more of these experiential modes may be dominant. The modes may provide a sort of 'types' of experiences, which people can have in nature. In this sense, this 'modes-model' offers a number of useful concepts to further understand and conceptualise the concept of experience.

### **Mood and emotions**

Mood can be defined as 'the subtle subjective state or feelings at any moment given' (Hull, 1991, p.252). Mood can be translated into subjective feelings such as excitement, happiness, boredom, relaxation and arousal. Each of them can occur as a consequence of certain experiences (Hull, 1991). Experiences that are related to recreation in nature often are accompanied by satisfying and pleasurable moods. During an experience, moods change, and also negative moods can be experienced. Fear, for example, for getting attacked by animals or for getting lost. On the other hand, however, fear can also increase enthusiasm, e.g. when parachuting (McIntyre & Roggenbuck, 1998). Russels bi-dimensional approach (1980) specifically looks at the degree to which different individuals incorporate the subjective experience of pleasure and arousal into their experience. Here, arousal refers to the degree to which visitors feel activated, stimulated or active (definition of pleasure is given in the above section). Therefore, it can be suggested that stimuli of the surrounding environment influence pleasure and arousal (Bingé, Gnoth, & Andreu, 2008). Personal influences such as personal variables also seem to have an influence on moods as they shape them during the on-site experience (McIntyre & Roggenbuck, 1998). The emotional state at the moment of the experience should, therefore, not be neglected when researching the concept of experience. The concept of moods, therefore, seems useful during this research when looking for the answers of the research question.

### **Triggering all senses**

All senses are triggered when recreating outdoors in nature. The visitor experience in nature is, therefore, not only about the physical activity that is undertaken, but the multisensory impressions influence the experience as well. When experiencing nature you not only see the environment around you, but you also smell the scents of flowers and plants, you hear birds singing, you feel the texture of objects such as leaves and chestnuts you find on the ground, and taste the berries that you pick or the plates at the local restaurant. Medway (2015, p.191) states that 'the non-seeing senses provide important information about the space around us that is often crowded out by the visual'. He cites several studies that show the importance of the involvement of the non-visual senses. He demonstrated that sounds have an important influence on human perception and behaviour. Smell stimulates linkages with other places and / or past memories. Taste and touch play a role in how individuals navigate, understand and appreciate a place. All these 'non-visual' senses are often processed subconsciously (Porteous, 1990). However, the last two senses (smell and taste) are often less triggered in a natural landscape, then the other senses because they are local occurrences and involve direct physical contact. It is also different per individual how these senses are interpreted, depending on their past experience and frame of reference. Pine and Gilmore (2011), who look at experiences from an economic perspective, emphasise on the importance triggering all the five



human senses. They suggest that stimulating all senses effectively will get a person involved very intensively, which has 'a memorable experience' as a consequence. When experiences involve all senses, people will start to appreciate the organisation that is providing them (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). To conclude, these publications point to the importance of senses, playing an integral part in the recreational experience. For that reason, it seems appropriate to also use this concept as an important dimension of the recreational experience.

In summary, the literature discussed above shows that there are several 'variables' that influence the kind of subjective experiences people have when recreating in nature. Also, the experience itself can be conceptualised in different ways, for instance in terms of the attainment of a state of flow; the 'perception' of nature and the 'mood' one gets when recreating. Each of these conceptualisations of the phenomenon of visitor experience involves different sets of 'independent' variables influencing the actual quality of the experience (mood, flow, perception, etc.). As visitor experiences are a subjective phenomenon, all kinds of intrapersonal factors are mentioned to have an influence on the actually emerging experience: personal values, past experiences, expectations, and needs. Of these factors especially the needs (and the focus of attention related to certain configurations of needs) seem to be relevant 'variables' to take up in this thesis research project. Also the past experiences (including a certain degree of competence) a visitor has had with and in the natural estate seem to be an important factor to understand the actual experience. As the triggering of (all) senses has an important explanatory role in understanding visitor experiences, also this factor is used in the empirical research for this thesis. For this research, it was tried to measure the quality of experiences and the factors that influence this quality with the use of these concepts and variables.

### The activity in outdoor recreation

A natural area must offer certain facilities for visitors in order to practice certain activities. On the one hand, the concept of use value refers to the opportunities offered by the surroundings for the pursuit of recreational activities (Lengkeek, 1996). On the other hand, the concept also has an intrapersonal side: 'The use value of an environment depends upon an individual's interpretative processes: a visitor's cognitive representation of the spatial environment influences his/her opinions on its possible or appropriate use' (van Marwijk, 2009, p.42). Individuals look for a landscape to fulfil a certain kind of function. The preference or attractiveness of a certain landscape can, therefore, be dependent on the extent to which the landscape fulfils the function that is aspired by the individual. Given this intrapersonal side of use value, the features of a landscape that are of interest are dependent on the functions the individual has in mind (Buijs, Pedroli, & Luginbül, 2006). This entails that the experience of a landscape can differ per moment, as one may look for different functions on different occasions. Furthermore, different landscapes can 'elicit' different aspired-for functions. This means that one kind of activity (for instance camping) may have completely different meanings and experiences for the individual, given the aspired for function. There are, for example, different meanings of the activity 'camping', such as sleeping in a caravan in a parking lot or sleeping under the stars in a remote wilderness area. This brings Jenkins (2003) to the conclusion to refer to 'activity' as 'a virtually endless number of activity labels' (p.5) ranging from camping and hunting to swimming and playing football, each with different potential meanings and experiences. By understanding what kind of functions visitors are looking for, and finding the underlying meaning of certain activities in outdoor recreation, more knowledge can be gained about the experience.

In short, activities are a primary element of the visitor experience. The meaning of an activity, however, differs per individual. This underlying meaning causes that people have different natural experiences. It is important for this research to take into account that every experience is unique and informed by different underlying aspired-for functions.

So far, the literature is discussed on the background variables explaining the visitor's experience and – more concrete – the use value they attach to a natural area. It became clear that there are many variables and dynamics involved, leading to the conclusion that there cannot be a one on one relationship between the characteristics of a certain natural area on the one hand and the concrete experience a visitor of that area has, on the other hand. For one visitor, a natural estate can evoke a very positive experience; but exactly that same estate can bring about very negative experiences for another visitor, implying a low use value. Yet, until now, only one side of the coin is discussed: the side of the visitor seeking a subjective experience in nature. Now it is time to turn the coin and look at the characteristics of the landscape itself.

### The natural setting

Many recreational activities take place in artificial or unattractive environments, for example, climbing on an indoors artificial rock face, or fishing from the bank or canal in an abandoned industrial area. As Bell (2008) argues, 'for most people the setting in which the recreation takes place is a very important part of the whole experience' (p.15). Several authors including the Kaplans (1998) and Bell (2008) argue that the setting plays a dominant role in the visitor experience. This makes it relevant to look closely at the role of setting, which is, in this case, the natural settings of Natuurmonumenten in which people recreate.

In the academic literature researched for this study, several aspects of the natural setting are highlighted (an overview of this literature can be found in Appendix II):

1. *The visual aspect.* The literature about the 'natural setting' is often dominated by the visual aspects of an area; the scenic beauty. This visual aspect is claimed to have a leading role in the overall experience of the observer, or, in this case, the visitor (de Vries, 2009). Yet it is hard to make general statements on what people like about certain landscapes, as each individual responds differently to aspects of the natural environment partly depending on their prior experiences and on their current situation (Bell, 2008; Bell, et al., 2009; Kaplan, 1985; Manning, 2010).

2. *The kind of landscape.* In some studies (e.g. Bell, 2008; Bell, et al., 2009) it is suggested that natural areas and forests are preferred to agricultural landscapes. It is also highly valued when an area has some kind a historical character.

3. *The clarity of route indicating.* Kaplan (1985) suggest that landscapes are often preferred when way finding indicators are clear. Kaplan, et al. (1998) argue that marked trails and landmarks can serve as points of orientation in natural environments.

4. *The 'welcoming' of an area.* Kaplan et al. (1998) state that an area must have elements that invite visitors to go deeper into the scene in the sense that visitors want to know more about what they see or that they want to explore the area more. This appears to make the region more attractive, according to these authors. Understanding and exploration play a major role in way finding when getting deeper into the scene. 'Understanding' refers to the desire of people to make sense of their world, to comprehend what goes around them (Kaplan, et al., 1998). Kaplan, et al. (1998) elaborate on this by explaining that when people cannot understand a situation, they can become distressed. Understanding, however, is not enough. 'People want to explore, to expand their horizons and find out what lies ahead. They seek more information and look for new challenges' (Kaplan, et al., 1998, p.10). The extent to which an area is found challenging depends on how familiar one is with an environment. Frequently visiting an area has an influence on the experience as the area becomes less and less challenging as one already knows how the area is designed. Frequent visits can eliminate a

part of the mystery of the area (de Vries, 2009) as well. Physical or natural changes (for example, by the seasons) can create new challenges and curiosity again. On the other hand, repeat-visits can also lead to instinctive connectedness and even appropriation of the area. Not much is known about the appropriation in relation to the recreational experience. However as de Vries (2009) describes, it plays an important role when changes appear in the area.

5. *Anonymity of the landscape.* In many settings, there are limited opportunities for expanding the horizons of the visitors. There are still a lot of large natural areas with little focus, which suggest that nothing special is going on (Kaplan et al., 1998). One is not excited to explore the setting because it seems like it is all the same anyway. Typically, these kinds of landscapes commonly get low ratings. Another example of such ‘anonymous’ landscapes, are landscapes with dense vegetation. These kinds of landscapes are not evaluated positively because it often lacks a clear focus, which can lead to confusion and the concern of becoming lost. A position in the middle is rather preferred, where trees vary in number, height, girth, canopy and species, and the ground has a relatively smooth surface (grazed, mowed, covered with pine needles). These scenes are evaluated as ‘inviting’ and are perceived as having a clear focus. In their overview of characteristics of landscapes, Kaplan et al. (1998) conclude that the elements of ‘understanding’ (knowing where to go, possibilities for orientation) and ‘exploration’ (possibility to go deeper into the scene; learn and discover new things) are two basic dimensions on which landscapes can be classified. On the other hand, these authors distinguish so-called 2-dimensinal aspects of a landscape (which have to do with its physical properties as textures, groupings and location) and 3-dimensional aspects of a landscape (which involve the inference of what is deeper in the scene, something that occurs rapidly and unconsciously). Combining these, Kaplan et al (1998) present their Preference Matrix (figure 2.2) categorising four different kinds of aspects of landscapes (and of landscape design). This figure shows that landscape coherence (the ordering of the setting, how it is organised) and complexity (the richness of elements in the setting, considering different visual components) concern the 2-dimensional aspects of a landscape. Landscape legibility (the distinctiveness in a natural area, for example, by looking at the memorable components that help with orientation. The more people visit a particular area, the more visitors start to see the rich and special features and memorable distinctiveness out of the disorder) and mystery (the opportunity of finding more as one keeps on looking) concern 3-dimensional aspects of a landscape. Coherence and legibility both provide information, that help with making sense of the environment. Complexity and mystery, on the other hand, suggest the potential for exploration because of the variety of elements and the clues that imply there may be more to be seen.

	Understanding	Exploration
2-D	Coherence	Complexity
3-D	Legibility	Mystery

Figure 2.2 Preference Matrix (Kaplan et al., 1998)

6. *Provision of information.* A last issue that is commonly referred to in literature, contributing to the visitor experience, is the information that is provided on site. Bell (2008) recognises the great importance of information exchange as visitors have certain requirements with regard to the information that is provided. Kaplan et al. (1998) argue that the main focus when providing information must be in answering the needs of the visitors. The information needs to address people’s concerns as well as providing information to make the visitors’ outdoor experience in nature satisfying. This includes information that conveys the essentials of the site such as the routes, paths, and trails for way-finding, special activities in the area, presence of toilets, opening hours and codes of behaviour. Sharing information, however, often fails to be satisfying.

Overseeing the literature on the site characteristics, it is found that there are some general characteristics influencing visitors in a rather homogenous way. To a certain degree, it seems to contradict the literature discussed earlier, which showed that visitor experiences are subjective. Continuing the literature research, the discussion above still does not cover all the relevant aspects of the experience someone has in nature. Until now, it looks like the visitor experience is a phenomenon emerging in the interaction with a natural environment having certain characteristics. Yet, there is another matter, which shows that the experience of a landscape is not only caused by variables 'within' the individual and the characteristics of the landscape. Namely, the meaning one attaches to a landscape; the way it is experienced, is influenced by the stories of others about that landscape. This cognitive perspective is abandoned and replaced by a more social constructionist approach. In the literature, the experience of a natural area is not only located in the interaction between the individual and the natural area, but also in the social context of stories about the natural area of others and of other visitor experiences.

### Stories and events

Next to the use value and the physical characteristics of a natural area, also stories that are told about the landscape can have an influence on the experience of the visitor (Goossen & de Boer, 2008). The so-called 'narrative value'. The concept of narrative value is used to refer to the construction and sharing of stories about a specific environment, for instance, about the variety of interesting facts, the specifics of an area concerning the history of a place or a reference to the people who have lived there (Lengkeek, 1996). This can among others happen through word-of-mouth and official channels such as the natural area's advertising. Storytelling refers to a process 'in which a particular person (the storyteller) orally evokes past events that occurred in a particular place' (Blizard & Schuster, 2007, p.176). 'These evocations, collectively termed stories, range from vignettes (snapshots of a place at a particular point in the past) to anecdotes or more elaborated narratives concerning particular events' (Blizard & Schuster, 2007, p.176). Heyd (2007) stresses the importance of stories arguing that stories are likely to enrich our capacity to appreciate nature aesthetically, leading to a better understanding and a deeper recognition of the value of the natural environment. Besides collective stories about a specific environment, people can also have personal stories and memories for which they can value a place (Jacks, 2007). For instance, when someone is telling to intend to go visit one of the properties of Natuurmonumenten to a friend, that friend will share her personal memories about the things she remembered from that place. In other words, visitors reproduce their (earlier) experiences of experiences of others into stories, which they share with others. 'Own experiences can create changes in the representations they pass on to others in their travel stories' (Moscardo, 2010, p.46). De Vries (2009) argues that one can get familiar with a particular natural area, for example, during their youth. When this was a pleasurable period, the same natural area or a similar one, can evoke positive associations at a later age.

Storytelling is not simply giving information, but it brings the listener into a 'plot' where they can experientially relate to the information given (Randall & Kathy, 1998). Rather than passive absorption of information, stories create the possibility for people to visualise the events in the stories, which can cause involvement with and a better understanding of the subject in the story. In stories, typically facts are presented in such a way that they evoke the senses:

*I remember once we walked in the nature area and within minutes the sky went completely dark. Suddenly – almost at the same time – a bright light and intense rumble shocked befell us... we trembled on our feet!*



Several studies about storytelling on nature indeed showed that the telling of stories can function as means of enhancing people's connection with nature, potentially influencing the visitor experience (Sandlos, 1998; Wirth & Gamon, 1999). Stories can give meaning to a place and create an emotional bond with that place.

What this literature shows is that the overall meaning of a bond people have with a natural area goes further than the concrete experience at that place. This not only goes for evaluative stories about an area which people hear from others, but also for stories about specific features of the landscape itself. For instance, a certain hill gets more interesting when a hiker is told a story that that hill actually is a grave mound (Goossen & de Boer, 2008). Blizard and Schuster (2007) also showed that the sharing of cultural history stories and natural history stories has an effect on the experiences of people. Cultural historical stories enhance the historical recognition of a place. 'Natural history stories show an increase in people wanting to explore a place, along with identifying their discoveries. The stories were found to affect the functional engagement with place, a dimension which involved participants' active engagement with the forest, expressed by their further exploration of the site and discovery of new things there' (Blizard & Schuster, 2007, p.193).

One way of storytelling is through attributing new meanings to particular surroundings. The location could be framed as a unique place, focussing on the unique points of the area. Visitor centres, websites and leaflets of the specific area are considered to be relevant to the construction of such kind of stories. Oral storytelling also appeared to be very effective, as this requires active participation on the part of the listeners. Especially when stories are told where they actually occurred, listeners can easily be imaginatively taken to the place as it was at the time of the story (Blizard & Schuster, 2007). Walker and Deng (2003) emphasise that storytelling through more technologically advanced media can also be very effective compared to stories being offered using more traditional oral and print media. These so-called visual stories are more easily sustained because of the focus on vision. Next to that, advanced technologies have the ability to 'grab' our attention through bigger screens, better pictures, better sounds and, therefore, they potentially have the ability to better transport us to where the story is taking place. However, there are different ways to tell a story, and certain ways of storytelling may be more feasible used to attract particular market segments. Moscardo (2010) argues that visitors may have different needs at different stages in their lives. Different stories of one area can be targeted to the different audiences.

To conclude, the literature discussed above argues that stories are critical elements in influencing the visitor experience and the bond people have with nature. For this research, it could be relevant to look at which 'general' stories are present about the natural areas that are researched. Stories potentially can be used as a tool to influence the visitor experience of the natural environment. For example, when it is necessary to hedge an area to recover an ecosystem, a better understanding by the visitors can be developed by using stories (Ribe, 2002). Yet Goossen and de Boer (2008) warn not to oversimplify the use of stories. They point out that different user groups can have different needs for information and so react differently to certain stories. A 'one story for all' – solution is not possible.

## Post-demographic consumerism

Above, four core categories concerning the recreational experience are described. To be able find a way to approach these categories, this section looks at market segmentation.

To meet the specialised needs of the visitors, diversification of natural areas will become more important. According to the Trendwatchers (2014), people are constructing their own identities more freely now. The ability to experiment and identify with a wider (international) diversity of brands and products leads to a wide diversification of identity-positions and consumption patterns, which are less related to traditional demographic characteristics such as age, gender, location, and income. As a consequence, traditional demographic-centric models of recreational experiences possibly are not applicable anymore. In the UK, for example, women now account for the majority of video game players. Also, most gamers are aged over 44 (Trendwatching.com, 2014). More directly related to outdoor recreation, it appears that more than half of the GPS users during an outdoor recreational activity is over 50 years old (de Bruijn et al., 2013). These examples show that every recreationist has different needs and expectations of natural areas, leading to the conclusion that it is not possible anymore to effectively serve all recreations in one large market. Of course this immediately summons the question how to navigate this 'post-demographic world'. Trend watchers (2014) advice to look for different demographics, and focus on ever smaller niches of interest-based segments rather than circumstances and the over-generalizing traditional demographics.

In market segmentation, a heterogeneous market is divided into a number of smaller homogeneous markets (Batty, 2003). These segments include groups that are similar with respect to characteristics regarding among others the types of services, pricing and communication (Bingé, et al., 2008; Dolnicar, 2008). Segmentation allows managers of natural areas such as Natuurmonumenten foresters, to strategically place outdoor recreation products or services to better meet the recreationists' needs. With segmentation it is possible to specialise on the needs of a particular group (González & Bello, 2002; Dolnicar, 2008).

Market segmentation is nowadays widely utilised in the recreation industry, using geographical, socio-economical, demographical, psychographic and behavioural segmentation (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013). For instance, recreationists have been segmented on the basis of the type of activities in outdoor recreation (i.e. Manning, 2010). Manning argues that activities are the most straightforward form of social aspects in outdoor recreation. The concepts and theories discussed before in this chapter, however, pointed out that the recreational experience includes more than only the activity itself. Another possibility is segmentation based on motivation (i.e. Beh & Bruyere, 2007; Bieger & Leasser, 2002), on benefits gained from the visit (for instance, Hendricks, Schneider, & Budruk, 2004; McCool & Reilly, 1993) and on environmental attitudes of visitors (i.e. Formica & Uysal, 2001; Uysal, Jurowski, Noe, & McDonald, 1991). There do not seem to be definite formulas for determining which descriptors are most useful for segmenting a particular recreational market. Therefore, new segmentation criteria are constantly being devised and applied nowadays (Bingé et al., 2008).

The conceptualisation of the lifestyle construct as a segmentation variable has rarely been found in case-related outdoor recreation studies during the literature study of this research. Also only a few general inquiries about the usefulness of lifestyle segmentation in outdoor recreation were found in academic literature (for instance, González & Bello, 2002; Scott & Parfitt, 2005; Veal, 1993). This makes the aspiration to segment estate visitors, as well as the creation of sizeable and distinguishable segments, potentially relevant for this thesis research (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013). A potentially promising segmentation criterion could be segmentation based on lifestyle. Here visitors are categorised looking at their activities in terms of 1) how they spend their time; 2) their opinions, their

perceived importance of their immediate natural surroundings; and 3) their opinions in terms of their view of themselves and the world around them (Crompton, 1983, p.21; González & Bello, 2002). These lifestyle patterns allow to identify more 'holistic' persons instead of paying attention only to isolated fragments that provide limited information about the behaviour like socio-demographics (Plummer, 1974). Segmentation based on lifestyle could unify various partially relevant segmentation variables. In the Netherlands, this kind of segmentation is translated to a model that identifies different segments of recreational users (SmartAgent, 2010). This so called Brand Strategy Research (BSR)-model is based on behavioural sciences, sociology and psychology and differentiates between the lifestyles of recreationists. Using information on Dutch people's demographics, preferences and favourite activities, seven different lifestyles have been developed. Given the Dutch information base, these lifestyle segments are only applicable to the Dutch public.

### The BSR-model

In this paragraph the BSR-model will be explored in depth. The BSR model adopts the seven lifestyle segments that are represented in figure 2.3. The percentages in the figure reflect the size of these segments in the Netherlands. The horizontal axis of the matrix indicates the sociological dimension, determined by the degree to which a person is focused on the ego or the social (group) environment. People that tend towards the left side of the axis are more individualistic and put their own goals and ambitions first. People on the right side of the scale rather adapt to others in their social environment. The vertical axis reflects the psychological dimension, distinguishing an extrovert open attitude from a closed attitude towards others in the natural environment. Based on these two dimensions, four 'experience worlds' of vitality, harmony, control and security are developed. These experience worlds are based on the degree of exercise or relaxation and the degree to which the activity is central for the recreational activity or the companionship with others (SmartAgent, 2010, 2012a). For instance, people in the two worlds on the right side are more focussed on going away with family or friends, while the activities are not very relevant and everyone can do what he/she feels like.



Figure 2.3 Segmentation based on lifestyles (SmartAgent, 2010)

The seven lifestyle segments are spread over the four experience worlds; some of them belong to two worlds and are placed on their borders. These lifestyle segments can be described as follows:

*Exuberantly (yellow)* – this group includes active and sportive hedonists, who are energetic and enthusiastic. They enjoy having contact with family and friends, and therefore often recreate in big groups or with the family. Their income is a little bit above average and when choosing their activities they find it important that everyone feels comfortable.

Key words: cheerful, spontaneous, energetic, enjoy life. Key activities: shopping, visiting zoos, water sports.

*Cosy (lime)* – this group is characterised by cosy people that recreate to escape from their daily routines. Therefore important characteristics are: the need to feel free, seeking peace and rest and doing what they feel like. People within this category enjoy their activities most when they can do it with other people. The majority of this group includes families with older children and single and two-person households.

Key words: Honest, helpful, friendship, respect. Key activities: walking, biking, going out to the woods or waters.

*Enterprising (purple)* - people within this category are looking for surprise and inspiration. They want to discover and see new and special things and therefore 'the regular' is often not good enough. Culture-related, as well as sports activities, are central in this category. This category includes many youngster and single- and two-person households.

Key words: culture, surprise, critical, cocky, triggers. Key activities: visiting concerts, visiting monuments, jogging, ice skating, playing tennis, cycling.

*Inspiring (red)* – in general these people are creative and are looking for new, inspiring, experiences by going off the beaten track. In most cases these people are independent, intelligent, self-conscious, artistic and interested in music. The biggest part of this group consists of younger people between the ages of 18 and 34.

Key words: creative, challenging, adventurous, personal development. Key activities: clubbing, visiting events and remarkable monuments.

*Quiet (green)* – people within this category can be characterised as quiet, sober, thoughtful and serious. Recreation is meant to 'reload the battery' and relax. It is not necessary to travel far as the own environment provides enough to discover. They feel like there are a lot of changes nowadays, while in the past it was often better. This group mainly includes people of the older age group.

Key words: rest in own environment, privacy, anonymity, shy. Key activities: walking, biking, visiting forests and visiting museums and monuments.

*Modest (aqua)* – mindful, broadminded, quiet, serious, balanced and interested in others are characteristics of this group, which often include 'empty nesters' that have time for their own interests again. They think about what they can mean for this society, and also like to participate in the changing society. So in contrast with the purple and red recreants, the aqua recreationist is more quiet, not too active. More than half of the people within this category have followed secondary or higher education.

Key words: social connectedness, solidarity, gentle. Key activities: activities to keep fit such as biking and (Nordic) walking and visiting sights and monuments.



*Stylish and luxurious* (blue) – these people are intelligent and business-like and often have busy and dynamic lives. They feel they work hard enough so they can spend their free time in style with all the luxury involved. That is why they enjoy more exclusive forms of recreation that keeps them away from the busy daily routines. In their free time they spend time to broaden their social network and therefore enjoy being around ‘the same sort’ of people.

Key words: social network, confident, management. Key activities: active sports in combination with wellness and VIP arrangements.

In the period of August until beginning of October 2014, Natuurmonumenten undertook a survey research project among the Dutch population about their experiences in nature (Natuurmonumenten, 2014d). Based on the data of the survey the respondents were categorised using the BSR-model. Among the 42.000 respondents, it was concluded that the cosy lime segment strongly underrepresented among the survey respondents. The biggest segments were the modest aqua, quiet green and entrepreneurial purple lifestyle. Based on the results of this survey, the bureau SmartAgent advised Natuurmonumenten to focus their future plans mainly on the modest aqua, quiet green, entrepreneurial purple, and inspiring red lifestyles. Specifically the modest aqua lifestyle is interesting because of the large number of people belonging to this segment. The enterprising purple segment is attractive because this group has relatively more money to spend compared to the other groups.

### **Conclusions about segmentation**

After having examined different ways of segmentation, the segmentation based on lifestyle, using the BSR-model, seems to be a useful tool for better understanding the people who are visiting the natural areas and how they can be best approached. Additional reasons for using this type of segmentation are:

#### **Reasons for choosing the lifestyle segmentation model of SmartAgent**

- Lifestyle segmentation seems to provide an ‘holistic’ portrait of the visitor;
- This model is concrete and has a clear distinction between the segments;
- The model specifically focuses on segmentation for *recreation* purposes (SmartAgent, 2010);
- It is possible to link data with zip codes and, therefore, provide data that can be coupled with natural areas. With the help of a Geographical Information System (GIS) it is possible to analyse the inhabitants of certain regions and the extent to which the segments are represented in these regions. This allows for making statements on the wishes and motives of a recreational area on a local level;
- The model is widely used among recreation entrepreneurs, nature- and landscape managers, and non-profit organisations such as cultural historical organisations. Most provinces in the Netherlands adapting lifestyle segmentation make use of this model. Because many companies and organisations are involved, a lot of information is available for each of the segments and methods for using this model;
- Natuurmonumenten recently adopted this model to help them find new ways to approach their visitors. The association understands this model and knows how to work with it. It could be confusing and time-consuming to let the organisation become familiar with another sort of segmentation.

## 2.2 Conceptual framework

Overviewing the scientific literature on the visitor experience it has become clear that several quite distinct theoretical approaches can be discerned. In the first approach, all the attention goes out to the dynamics of the visitor, explaining visitor experiences as the result of 'internal' processes and variables. On the other hand, literature can be found placing the emphasis on the other side of the coin, namely, the characteristics of landscapes, which can influence the recreational visitor experience. A third perspective emerges when attention is paid to the social context of the visitor: the stories people tell each other about certain natural areas either directly or through social media. Rather than researching the visitor experience using only one of these perspectives, the decision is made to combine all of these perspectives into one single conceptual model, figure 2.4; thus demonstrating the multi-dimensional nature of visitor experience. In this model, elements of all the perspectives are represented, as well as potential relationships between the different perspectives. This conceptual framework is used as a guiding overview for the following phases of this study. In the sections below, the conceptual model will be explained further.

The conceptual framework integrates the four theoretical perspectives that are found in the literature. The central focus of this research is the experience of the *visitors*. Visitor experiences are partly determined by *personal characteristics* of the visitor (Pigram, 2003b). Based on these characters, people have certain *expectations, demands, preferences* and *knowledge* that influence the choice of outdoor reaction and the area where they do that. Each individual has different *motivations* for their actions and has different skills depending on their level of commitment (Hayllar, 2003).

Natural environments as a place to recreate outdoors contain certain features that either contribute to the experience or make it unattractive for visitors. These features have to do with the opportunities for specific activities or *facilities* an area has to offer (Lengkeek, 1996), the diversity of the area, *accessibility* and the presence of *animals* which can have positive, as well as negative effects on the visitor experience (Kaplan, 1985; Kaplan et al., 1998). The *intangible* assets of an area; the *narratives* that people are familiar with, play a part in the commitment of the visitors to an area (Goossen & de Boer, 2008). The personal memories that people have of an area can also bring forth emotions that influence the way individuals come to experience an area (de Vries, 2009). *Crowding* influences the recreational experience negatively (Bell, et al., 2007).

Recreational visitor experiences are strongly linked to the kind of outdoor *activities*, which are undertaken and the specific functions attributed to these activities. To illustrate, a runner has a different needs and thus potentially different experiences than a cyclist. They both have different expectations of an area and both have different wishes and needs. (Buijs, et al., 2006). Also, within one activity people can have very varying experiences, given different expectations, needs and aspirations.

Interpreting the environment during the outdoor recreation activity is *multisensory*. The human senses contribute to experiences as they stimulate certain thoughts and linkages (Medway, 2015). It depends on the focus of attention, which also is of influence on the way the natural environment is experienced. An experience can imply a *satisfied* feeling and bring *enjoyment*, but can also lead to negativity *critique*.

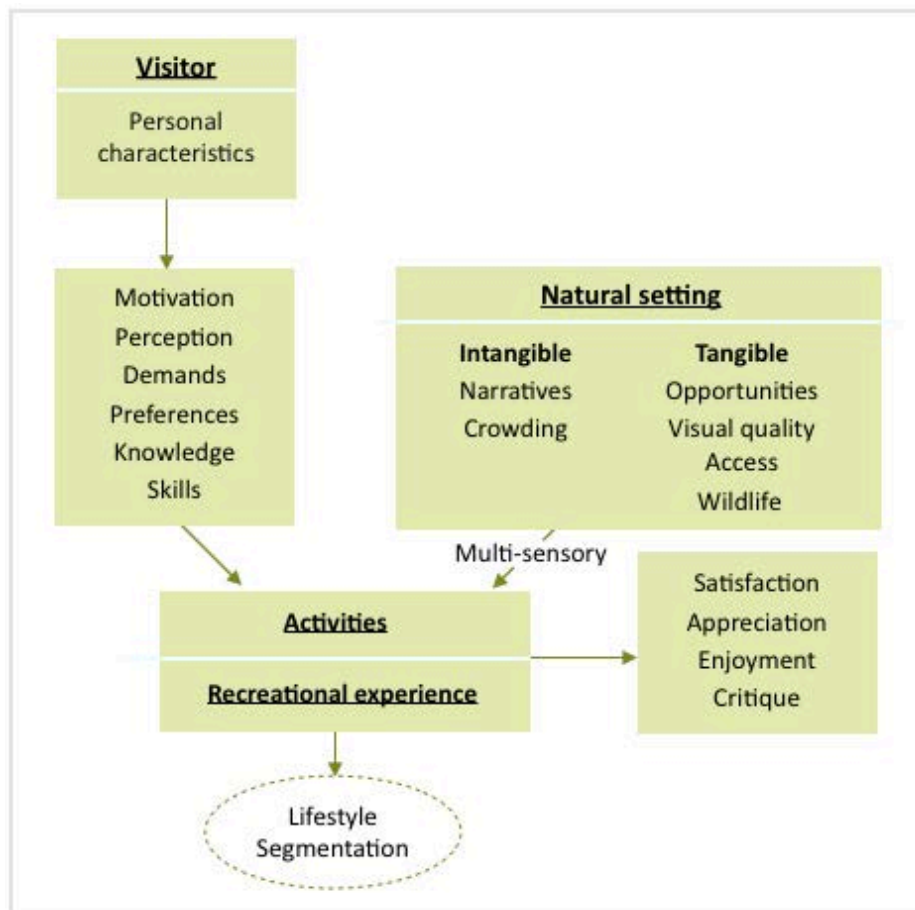


Figure 2.4 Conceptual framework

The concepts that are shown in the upper part form the theoretical backbone, which is used in this study to explore the recreational experience of the visitors of the estates of Natuurmonumenten. In the following chapter, the methodology and methods used for the empirical research will be discussed.



# 3

## Methodology

This chapter discusses the research design, the methods of data collection and the data processing. This research is conducted with a qualitative approach. Literature reviews, semi-structured interviews, open question surveys and observations were used to collect the data. The chapter ends with discussing the reliability and validity of the research and the methodological difficulties.



## 3. Research methodology

This chapter elaborates the research design for this study. As concluded in the previous chapter, qualitative research on visitor experiences using an integral conceptual approach (see figure 2.4, conceptual framework) is quite scarce. As a consequence, this study has an explorative character. The relative scarcity of comparable research makes it impossible to use research designs from existing studies, necessitating a rather experimental approach for the methodology of this thesis research. The first section presents the methodological considerations of this research, which includes the choice of a qualitative approach and the research paradigm within which this research can be situated. Secondly, the operationalization of the research design will be explained, discussing the case studies that will be used for this research. After this, the concrete research methods that are used in the case studies will be discussed. With these methods, data are gathered about the concepts of the conceptual framework (figure 2.4). At the end of this section, an overview will be provided that shows the methods used per research question.

### 3.1 Methodological considerations

In this paragraph, the research paradigm for this research is reviewed, including its relevance for this research. After this, the arguments for using a qualitative research approach are presented.

#### Philosophy

The underlying social science research paradigm for this study is interpretivism. The ontology of interpretivism implies a world that is not an objective reality directly influencing human behaviour, but a constructed world; a world given meaning to; an interpreted world. During their lives, people are confronted with a continuously changing environment and a vast amount of impressions. In their interaction with other people, they try to make sense of all these impressions, developing shared meanings of what is going on. In this sense, people do not react to an objective world, but to a world in which they interactively construct amongst themselves (Gorton, 2010; Schwandt, 2000). This ontology implies that human behaviour is informed by the meaning people construct about what they are confronted with. This meaning is influenced by the group of people amongst whom the meaning emerges. To clarify this with an example of Schwandt (2000), raising one's arm can mean different things such as voting, hailing a taxi, or asking permission to speak. 'Coherent' behaviour will emerge when people attribute the same meaning to the gesture. A consequence of using the interpretivist ontology is that the phenomenon of 'reality' does not exist. Strictly speaking reality does not exist until it is constructed in interaction. Or to phrase it differently: there is no objective reality; the only thing there is, are many interactively constructed subjective realities.

As a further consequence, it is assumed in the interpretivist paradigm that there are multiple viewpoints of the world, rather than one universal one (which is argued by positivists) (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011; Kaaristo & Järvi, 2012 ). This ontology implies that what people think, see, and feel and thus the way they give meaning to an experience is – epistemologically – the primary focus of the research attention. In relation to the visitor experience, this paradigm emphasises the subjectivity of human experiences in natural environments, and the ways in which people experience and perceive objects within a natural setting. The focus is on the kind of details of a situation, which are taken in to give meaning to, and on the subjective reality behind this selection of details involving subjective meanings, which bring forward actions. The epistemological consequence of the interpretivist paradigm is that relevant research data cannot only be gathered by observing visitors. Also, an in-depth understanding of their subjective beliefs, values, and sense making are important.



Knowledge is about the way in which people construct meaning about their outdoor activities, and what those meanings are (Schwandt, 2000). For interpretivists, the role of the researcher is to grasp the 'meaning' of the phenomena and describe the multiplicity of these different subjective realities (Gorton, 2010). Methodologically, this implies that the aim of data collection is to try to get 'insider knowledge' of the visitors recreating in nature (Lincoln et al., 2011). Relevant research strategies are field research, conducted in the natural setting. As the concrete natural and social context of the experience is very important, an in-depth study of a small sample of subjects is regarded as more appropriate than researching a large sample (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012).

### Qualitative approach

A qualitative approach seems the most suitable methodological choice for this research. The first reason for choosing a qualitative approach is that a qualitative approach is in line with the interpretive paradigm of this study. As Karmanov (2008) explains, a qualitative approach seeks to clarify a multiplicity of factors where social contexts are valued, and reality is subjective. A second argument for using a qualitative approach is that a qualitative approach allows for gaining in-depth understandings of the visitor's subjective worlds (Boeije, 2010). Furthermore, as the literature review showed, visitor experiences are complex phenomena, involving a range of different dimensions. Most studies on the visitor experience make use of quantitative research techniques. Using these techniques, several frameworks such as ROS (Brown, 2003) and LAC (McCool & Stephen, 2003) have been developed. As Jennings (2010) and Weber (2001) argue, a number of studies have been criticised because they used the quantitative perspective in researching the quality of experiences. The main point of criticism is that quantitative research does not enable researchers to achieve an integral, holistic impression of the subjectivity of the visitor experience. In most cases, quantitative research is undertaken using questionnaires that are based on strictly defined conceptual frameworks. What is researched are the dimensions of the model that served as an input for the operationalization of the research instrument. This implies that subjectivities, experiences, and meanings that lay outside of these pre-specified dimensions are not registered. Furthermore, as mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, this study has an explorative character, as not many similar studies have been conducted before. In exploratory research qualitative methods are very useful as they are flexible so that data collection can be adjusted to the findings which emerge (Boeije, 2010; Patterson, Watson, Williams, & Roggenbuck, 1998).

Qualitative methods allow for in depth probing of the deeper meanings of the visitor experience. For that reason, a qualitative approach will be adopted to offer the opportunity 'for participants to describe the subject of the study in their own words and to do so largely on their own conditions. They may express views, give words to their experiences and describe events and situations' (Boeije, 2010, p.32).

## 3.2 Research design

With this study, it was tried to develop insights about the recreational visitor experience, the natural setting and stories and events. Data were generated by means of a multiple case (also called cross-case) design, where four properties of Natuurmonumenten were examined with the intention to capture the experiences of the visitors in nature. Case studies were also necessary to gain knowledge about site characteristics in the natural setting such as the facilities, possibilities to practice certain activities, biodiversity, and how people (subjectively) interacted with those elements during their outdoor activity. Case studies allowed looking at behavioural events and interaction where no controlled environment is necessary. Really getting acquainted with specific natural areas (estates of Natuurmonumenten), closely observing the landscape and visitors, interviewing them extendedly,

made it possible to almost fully grasp the complexity of the visitor experience and see the different ways people experience nature. The advantage of a multiple case design was that it allowed for comparing cases. Even though the context of each of the research areas was quite diverse (will be explained later), it was still possible to get an impression of the different experiences and lifestyle segments, and distil more generalised conclusions. Another benefit of comparing different cases was that conclusions could be considered as being more convincing (Yin, 2013). Also, in a multiple case study the chance that research is undertaken in an extreme or unusual case that may deviate from the theory or everyday occurrences is smaller than in single-case designs. Lastly, looking at only one case study made the design vulnerable if only because 'all the eggs are put in one basket'.

The concrete research methods that were used in the cases of this research were interviews, observations and open question surveys. Each of these will be discussed in the section 'methods of data collection' below.

### Selecting the case studies

The selection of the case studies was done in several steps. The first step of the selection was simple. As this research only looks at the properties of Natuurmonumenten, all other nature areas in the Netherlands were disregarded. The second step was based on the surrounding lifestyle groups of the properties of Natuurmonumenten. This step requires a more detailed explanation. The conceptual framework contains a model that segments people on lifestyle in the field of recreation. In chapter two it was suggested that 'modest aqua' and 'entrepreneurial purple' lifestyles are the most interesting for Natuurmonumenten. In order to test whether this way of segmenting visitors is a useful tool to work with in order to improve the visitor experience, cases were selected by that are predominantly surrounded by the modest or the entrepreneurial lifestyle. Like Boeije (2010) argues, it is best to choose a location in which you can learn most about your topic. This is called 'the principle of maximisation' (Morse & Field, 1996). The most relevant case-locations are those where the topic of study potentially manifests itself most strongly. For that reason, the choice of the properties was based on the highest density of the modest aqua and entrepreneurial purple segments nearby the properties. With the help of so-called 'lifestyle atlases' (for example, SmartAgent, 2012a and figure 3.1) it was possible to determine which lifestyle segments surround the Natuurmonumenten areas. The atlases show maps of provinces and specific cities and villages within the provinces in the Netherlands. Every map shows the most common lifestyle colour per street. Other lifestyle colours are in most cases also present, but less dominant. This means that a lifestyle map only gives a first impression of the most common lifestyles in the district or neighbourhood. However, it needs to be taken into account that not every neighbourhood has the same amount of inhabitants. Furthermore, only the most common colours are represented in the maps (SmartAgent, 2012b). In most of the lifestyle atlases, elaborate and detailed fact sheets are provided that show the exact numbers of each of the lifestyles within an area. So together with the atlases, these fact sheets provide quite detailed overviews of lifestyles in the neighbourhood of Natuurmonumenten estates.

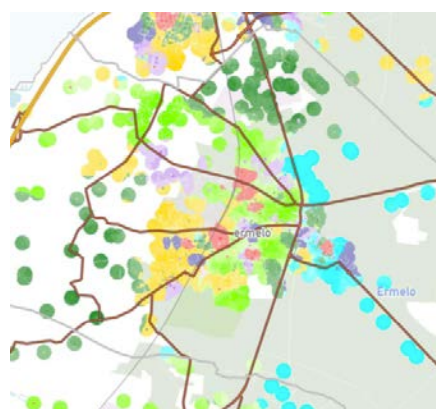


Figure 3.1 Example lifestyles in a region (SmartAgent, 2012b)

Narrowing down the possible case studies in step two, resulted in four possible research areas per lifestyle segment. The third and last step on which the selection of the research cases was based, involved the preferences of Natuurmonumenten. Employees of Natuurmonumenten (for instance forest rangers) looked at which of the proposed cases in their opinion was most suitable to conduct

the research. For example, one of the cases of the modest aqua lifestyle segment was Kaapse Bossen (province of Utrecht). The local forester indicated that recently two studies were undertaken in that area. To prevent that the local visitors were bothered too much with research projects, it was decided that Kaapse Bossen would not become one of the research cases. To approach the diversity of the parks as good as possible, the selected properties differ in size, vegetation and facilities. Although this makes it harder to compare the four cases, this choice also has a clear advantage. It can be argued that every nature area is unique, and, therefore, no cases are exactly similar. Of course, it was required that numerous people visited the nature areas on the weekends; otherwise it was not possible to conduct observations and interviews. Eventually, the selection was narrowed down to two cases per segment. These properties are represented in table 3.1 below. Each of the four areas will be extensively reviewed and discussed in the chapter four.

Research area	Province	Segment
Zuid-Kennemerland	Noord-Holland	Modest aqua
Planken Wambuis	Gelderland	Modest aqua
Kardinge	Groningen	Entrepreneurial purple
Heumensoord	Gelderland	Entrepreneurial purple

*Table 3.1 Selection of case studies*

### 3.3 Methods of data collection

The following paragraphs provide a description of the methods used in the case studies to collect data. As specified before, this research is conducted using a qualitative research approach. Therefore, the first paragraph will provide a short overview of commonly used methods within qualitative research. This is followed by descriptions of the methods that were used to collect the data for this research, namely, semi-structured interviews, open-ended question survey and direct observations.

#### Qualitative methods

There are several commonly used methods within qualitative research (Boeije, 2010; Saunders et al., 2012). These include participant observation, interviews, focus groups and ethnography. To give a brief overview, participant observations investigate the everyday situation, where the research takes part in the participant's everyday life analysing and interpreting people's behaviour. This method is usually conducted when little is known about the phenomenon, or when a phenomenon is somehow hidden from the view of outsiders. Interviewing is a form of conversation, which allows the interviewer to capture ideas and attitudes of the interviewee. Focus groups are similar to interviews but happen in a group. The strength of a group interview is that it allows to see the interactive patterns among group members and how they develop mutual understanding and shared ideas. Ethnography also investigates group dynamics. Ethnography is conducted by living amongst the ones who are studied. This allows the researcher to produce detailed cultural accounts of shared beliefs, behaviours, interaction, language and rituals in the lives within the group.

In order to capture the multidimensional view of experiences visitors have in nature, this research adopted multiple methods for data collection: observations, face-to-face interviews with the visitors of the Natuurmonumenten properties, and an online open question survey. The following sections look further into each of these methods.

#### Semi-structured interviews

The aim of the interviews was to find explicit dimensions of the visitor experience that could be matched with natural areas' qualities that managers could monitor and improve in their properties. A

semi-structured interviewing method consists of open questions, which refer to the dimensions of the conceptual framework (figure 2.4). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews help the researcher to pay attention to all aspects of the conceptual framework (figure 2.4). The meaning of behaviour in a particular setting cannot always be clarified by observations alone (Becker, Howard, & Blanche, 1957). Interviews help to gain a better understanding of the meaning that visitors construct about their visit to nature. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews allowed me to evaluate whether the answer provided by the participant was sufficient or if further inquiry was needed.

Interviews can be distinguished from each other by their predetermined structure. 'The more the interview is planned beforehand, the more the interviewer determines the direction of the interview' (Boeije, 2010, p.62). In a structured or standardised interview, respondents are asked a standard set of questions in the same order, with no additional probing. The opposite of structured interviews are unstructured or in-depth interviews. These interviews begin with one pre-planned question with subsequent questions triggered by reactions to the interviewees' responses (Patterson et al., 1998). Semi or half-structured interviews seek a balance between these two extremes. For this research, an unstructured interview style would not be suitable to attain the research aims, as it would be difficult to compare interviewees' responses. Also, the reliability of this interview tends to be weak (Willson & McIntosh, 2007). A disadvantage of the structured interview style is its potentially weak validity, as the questions focus on the prefixed research dimensions of the research, not allowing room for unexpected dimensions of subjective experience. Given these considerations a semi-structured style seems most suitable for this study.

I chose to conduct the interviews face-to-face (FtF) for this research. As stated by Opdenakker (2006) 'FtF interviews are characterised by synchronous communication in time and place. Due to this synchronous communication, as no other interview method FtF interviews can take its advantage of social cues' (p.3). These social cues among others include tone of voice, intonation and body language. They can add a lot of information to the verbal answer of the interviewee. Opdenakker (2006) argues that disadvantages of this interview technique are the travel time and travel costs it brings. In this thesis research project, the difficulty appeared not to be the travelling distance but rather the ability and willingness of participants to make time for the FtF-interviews. For that reason, I decided to look for an additional interview technique. A remote technique was adopted in the form of telephone interviews. This enabled me to schedule an interview at a time that suited the participants (King & Horrocks, 2010). Even though this interview technique does not allow to take advantage of the social cues, several studies (i.e. Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004) showed that the nature and depth of the data do not differ substantially from FtF-interviews. A total of 12 face-to-face and five telephone interviews were conducted. The shortest interview lasted 17 minutes and the longest interview took 50 minutes. Most interviews took approximately 30 minutes.

### **Interview guide**

To ensure the validity and the reliability of the interviews, an interview guide was created. The interview guide (in Dutch) used for this research can be found in Appendix III. The guide was designed by operationalizing the concepts discussed in the conceptual framework (figure 2.4). After the interview guide was created, a pilot interview was undertaken with a pedestrian who visited Zuid-Kennemerland. This person was a friend of the mine because this person needed to be able to critique the interview questions and the interview techniques. The feedback from the pilot interviews was adapted in the interview guide before starting with the 'official' interviews. At the beginning of the interviews, participants were asked for permission to record the conversation. All respondents agreed with recording the interview. Next to the recordings, the interviewer also made notes in case of malfunctioning of the recorder and to check if all the questions have been answered. Also memos

were used during the interviews. Observational memos described how the interviewee behaved because the recordings did not allow capturing this. Methodological memos were made to note adjustments in the interview techniques and the interview questions. To all interviewees, the confidentiality and the academic purpose of the research were guaranteed. The questions in the interview guide were predominantly open, which means they had no fixed categories for answering, but the participant was able to articulate his/her own point of view.

The order of the questions depended on the course of the interview because it happened to be that some of the planned questions did not need to be asked explicitly as the answer was already given before. Topics were addressed in a direct and indirect way, in order to capture initially seemingly hidden or unthought-of experiences, that may not be apparent to the participant him or herself. Also it was tried to create an informal atmosphere during the interview so that the participant felt comfortable enough to share personal stories. By conducting the interviews in the native language of the visitor (in all cases this was Dutch), people felt comfortable because they were able to use their own words. At the end of each interview, the interviewee was thanked for his or her participation, and was able to ask questions about their contribution and the content of the research. To increase the reliability of the interviews, the interviewer discussed the interview notes with the interviewee at the end of each interview. This allowed the interviewee to see if he/she still agreed with the points discussed in the interview. If this was not the case, notes were adapted according to the remarks of the participant. To each interviewee I gave a business card with my name and e-mail address for questions or feedback.

### **Interview location**

In each case study, the entrances of the four research areas were the location where the interviews took place (see appendix IV). The reason for interviewing at the entrances was that guests could be questioned directly after their recreational visit in nature so that the memory of the experience was still fresh. All the research areas were accessible via multiple entrances. For this research it was relevant to interview at different entrances as there was a possibility that different kinds of people could be found at each of the entrances (think for example about one entrance situated closely to a neighbourhood with a lot of youngsters, while another entrance lies close to an elderly home). Due to time constraints it was however only possible to conduct interviews at one or two entrances per research area. The two entrances were chosen based on the starting points of the recommended hiking routes provided on the Natuurmonumenten website and their popularity.

### **Sample**

The composition of a sample for qualitative research differs from the samples used in quantitative studies. In qualitative research, purposive sampling is used, where the sample is intentionally selected according to the needs of the study. Purposive sampling can generate a wide range of perspectives and experiences, rather than a replica of their frequency in the wider population, as is the aim of the sample of quantitative research (Boeije, 2010). For these reasons, I chose for purposive sampling in this study. In this research that means that respondents were chosen based on their age and the kind of recreational activity in nature in order to form a diverse sample. This resulted in a quite equal distribution of male and female respondents. 56 percent of the respondents were male, and 44 percent were female. Unfortunately, the proportion of hikers compared to the people practicing other activities was quite uneven. Due to the training schedules of runners it was only possible to talk with them when they were resting or doing their cooling down. This also counted for the mountain bikers, although they more often took a break, and the breaks were also longer. 'Normal' bikers on the other hand hardly stopped and were, therefore, very hard to approach. This led to a lack of biking participants. People that were horseback riding could not step off their horse and have a talk.



Fortunately enough, they often were very much prepared to have a talk after their ride. Individuals that met the following requirements were asked to participate in the interview or the online survey (see below).

- Participants can be female or male;
- The respondents must be older than 12 as they must be able to clearly communicate about their experiences with the interviewer;
- A participant must be a visitor of the research area and visit the area for recreational use. This does therefore not include individuals who pass through one of the research areas on their way to utilitarian destinations;
- Individuals who participate in an excursion in one of the research areas are not included.

### **Recruitment and access**

The selected Natuurmonumenten properties were visited on Saturdays or Sundays, depending on the weather conditions. The number of visitors could decrease with bad weather conditions and the weather could have an influence on the visitor experience (personal communication S. de Heij, 13 November, 2014). These days were chosen because Veer and Van Middelkoop (2002) argue that these are the days most people in the Netherlands enjoy outdoor recreation. The foresters of the research areas also confirmed this popularity of the weekend days. The foresters all gave permission to conduct interviews in their research areas.

### **Ethical issues**

The ethical issues that need to be addressed when conducting the interviews are:

1. Informed consent (Boeije, 2010): It was important that the interviewees knew the purpose of the research. To prevent ethical problems, I first introduced myself, the research topic and asked the interviewee for permission to record the interview. It was furthermore made clear that the interviewee was able to finish the interview whenever he/she wanted. Personal data was kept anonymous for the privacy of the interviewee.

2. As people were sometimes interviewed in a duo, it occurred that they not always provided the answers that they would have liked to give because of the presence of the other person. This problem was reduced by explicitly stating that honest answers better contributed to the research.

### **Open question survey**

On many occasions, the visitors did not have the time for an interview at the interview location nor a phone interview, yet they still were interested and willing to participate in the research, but in a way that was convenient for them. This methodological issue was solved by introducing an open question survey, as an additional research method. As these people were approached in the same location as the other respondents, using the same selection criteria, the group of people wanting to fill out a survey would fit in the sample. People who indicated to be interested to fill out a questionnaire were asked for their e-mail address. The same day, a link to the online survey was sent to their e-mail address. A business card with the name and the e-mail of the researcher and the involved instances also was given to these participants as a reminder to fill out the survey. In total, 55 visitors gave their e-mail addresses and 32 visitors actually filled out the survey. This number implies a response rate of 58 percent.

To be able to compare the outcomes of the interviews with the outcomes of the survey, I chose to use the same questions of the semi-structured interviews in the survey. These questions were predominantly open, except for a few demographical questions. The questions were slightly adapted so that they could easily be understood without further instructions. The survey questions and the link to the online survey can be found in Appendix V. The survey was created via ThesisTools, a platform where students can simply and without costs create an online survey. The surveys were tailored to the specifics of the research area and the kind of activity of the visitor.

## Observations

Part of this research was focused on assessing the interaction of people who recreate outdoors in the properties of Natuurmonumenten. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the behaviour of the visitors in nature was pursued. Observations (next to the interviews) were a suitable method to collect these kinds of data. During the interviews it may occur that the interviewee is unwilling or unable to share certain information. Especially when talking about their experiences, people might find it difficult to explain what they experienced at a certain moment, or why they behaved in a certain way. This will lead to gaps in the information needed to answer the research questions (Becker et al., 1957). According to Becker, et al. (1957) and Kawulich (2005) this is less likely to happen when the researcher observes the outdoor activities of the visitors. Observing non-verbal expressions and, more in general, the behaviour of the visitors can provide additional clues for appreciating the way the visitors feel and for the way they interact with nature. These more subtle clues might not be reported in an interview. Compared to other data collection methods, observations allow to see the differences between what people say (interview), and what they actually do (Becker et al., 1957). Also it enables the researcher to study behaviour as it takes place in a variety of situations (Karmanov, 2008). Observation as a method allows developing a more holistic understanding of the phenomena the research is about (Kawulich, 2005, p.23).

According to Saunders, et al. (2012) there are two types of observational methods. 'Structured observation' is concerned with quantifying the behaviour (frequency of actions) of the research subjects. This thesis research focuses on the other method of observation, participant observation. Participant observation is directed to 'discovering the meanings that people attach to their actions' (p.340). Four different dimensions are related to participant observation, distinguished by whether the researcher's identity is revealed or concealed and the extent to which the researcher participates in the activities. For this research, the role of 'secret outsider' seemed most relevant (Boeije, 2010). This means that the researcher's identity is not revealed, and the researcher is also not participating in any of the activities. The advantage of this role is that it helps to minimise the chance of altered behaviour of visitors, caused by the observer (Boeije, 2010). A disadvantage associated with observations is the difficulty of explaining the motivations behind the observed behaviour (Karmanov, 2008). It was, however, tried to overcome this problem by interviewing other people within the sample.

To be able to compare the outcomes of the observations in each of the four research areas, an observation guide, based on the theoretical framework, was created (Appendix VI). In every case, all present adults were observed, not differentiated by their activity. Kawulich (2005) suggests that when observing, one can 'sort out the regular from the irregular activities' and can 'look for the negative cases or exceptions' (p.8). This was done when looking at the social interaction between people and the interaction between humans and nature. By walking around on different user paths, simply watching and listening, observations revealed information on crowding issues, use of paths, use of nature and how the senses of visitors were triggered. A physical inventory was also conducted to get an impression of the facilities that were offered in the area, and how people use them. This was

simply done by walking through the area. Pictures of the setting were taken to afterwards reflect on the natural features the areas presented.

The observations did not cover all ground in the research areas as the areas were simply too big. Therefore, in every case, all observations at least covered the hiking routes that were recommended on the website of Natuurmonumenten. In most cases, these routes cover the often-used paths and show the natural as well as cultural highlights of the area (appendix IV highlights the observation routes per case study). Observations were done on the same days as the interviews (Saturdays and Sundays). They were conducted at different moments during the day, for approximately 6 hours per case study.

### Methods of data collection per research question

Figure 3.2 summarises which methods of data collection were used to generate an answer to each of the sub questions and the research question. The research question for this research is: 'How can Natuurmonumenten enhance the recreational visitor experience of the people who recreate at her properties?'. The sub questions that contribute to the answer of this research question are:

SQ 1: What is the recreational visitor experience?

SQ 2: What are the site characteristics?

SQ 3: What is the connection between the site characteristics and the recreational visitor experience?

SQ 4: How can the knowledge about recreational visitor experience, site characteristics and current trends contribute to the improvement of the future recreational visitor experiences?

As illustrated in figure 3.2, the answers to sub question one is generated from the literature study. Sub question two is answered by a combination of consulting different reports and a physical inventory of the areas with the help of observations. The input for the answer to sub question three was provided by sub questions one and two, as well as results from the interviews, surveys and the observations. Sub question four was predominantly answered by the output of sub questions one, two and three, with additional information from the interviews, surveys and observations. Eventually, the results from SQ1 to SQ4 contributed to answering the main research question.

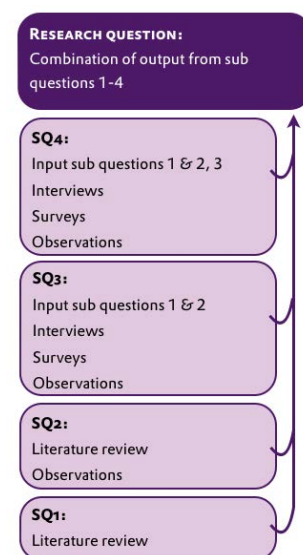


Figure 3.2 Methods per research question

## 3.4 Data Processing

Qualitative research is based on information expressed in words, such as feelings, emotions, descriptions and opinions (Walliman, 2006). In this research, the interviews and the open question survey generated non-numerical data in the form of recordings and written answers to the open questions. Transcripts of the recorded interviews, made it easier to analyse and compare them. The transcripts from the interviews, as well as the answers from the open-ended question survey, were content analysed following the suggestions of Boeije (2010). The guiding principle of this way of data analysis was to look for topics and issues emerging from the data with the help of coding. Boeije defines coding as 'categorizing segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarises and accounts for each piece of data' (p.95). Coding helps to distinguish themes or categories in the data. The qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti was used to become familiar with the data and to

open code the data. This led to an extensive coding scheme including approximately 150 codes. The next step was axial coding, where categories were described and delineated, and the level of conceptual abstraction was increased. Eventually, a code tree was constructed. The code tree represented group codes and sub-codes. To name an example, a group code was 'reasons for going into nature', with the sub-codes 'fresh air', 'to stay fit' and 'escape from busy life'. At the end, selective coding was used to determine the important categories, reassembling the data in order to be able to answer the research questions. The outcomes of the coding are presented in the following chapter. Before that, in the next paragraph the validity and reliability of the research and the methodological difficulties are discussed.

### Reliability and Validity

Several procedures have been undertaken to safeguard the quality of this research design. The research was conducted using multiple sources of evidence. This triangulation of methods increases the validity and the reliability of the research as it helps to ensure 'that the data are telling you what you think they are telling you' (Saunders, et al., 2012, p.146). Another additional advantage of triangulation is that it can be helpful when studying complex phenomena such as the visitor experience, as it permits to look at visitors and their experiences from different angles (Verschuren, 2011). This can reveal various dimensions of the visitor experience (Boeije, 2010). Furthermore, it allows to 'address more complicated research questions and collect a richer and stronger array of evidence that can be accomplished by any single method alone' (Yin, 2013, p.27). The use of multiple case studies also contributes to a greater external validity of the results (Gerring, 2007). Even though the research areas all have a different context and are, therefore, hard to compare, using multiple case studies still allows for results that will be applicable for other similar cases as well.

During the research, several difficulties were encountered that could pose a threat to the validity and reliability of the findings. These will be discussed in the following section.

## 3.5 Methodological difficulties

Various problems were encountered during this research. The main limitation involves the reliability of the research findings. The analysis of the qualitative data, (interview results, observations, outcomes of the open question survey), always entail an interpretation of the data. A certain degree of researcher bias could be the case. Furthermore, in the way the data were gathered, some potential shortcomings could be identified. The observations were carried out without the aid of recording materials such as a video camera. Also, the data were gathered by one researcher, not involving a second opinion of another researcher. Here a researcher bias could be possible too. The quality of the interview results was dependent on the interviewing skills of the researcher. However, by using a combination of a survey, observations and interviews with the visitors, possibly the researcher-influence could be diminished. Another limitation was that the research areas did not overlap in terms of context. These diverse circumstances lead to a smaller external generalizability of the results.

Also some more practical limitations were encountered. Due to time constraints, the study could not become a longitudinal-like study. Furthermore, the research was carried out in the autumn and winter period of November and December 2014. People may have different experiences in these seasons as other activities are practiced. Where people in summer like to practice activities in water sports and biking, people may participate in other activities in other seasons such as walking in autumn or ice-skating in winter (Veer & van Middelkoop, 2002). Attending different activities also brings different experiences. The weather also played a role during the interviews. People were not

always willing to have a long interview outside in the cold. Another problem encountered was that it was necessary to slightly adapt the research design. A reason for this adaptation was that the weather circumstances made it hard to convince people to have a long interview outside. Only one research area had the possibility to interview the visitors in a nearby coffee house. An additional reason for slightly changing the research plan was that it was hard to approach trimmers and bikers as they were fast-moving and hardly stopped when hailed. Although it is not the aim of qualitative research to get an exact representation of the research population (Boeije, 2010), mainly the pedestrians were willing to help with the research, which could have lead to a certain one-sidedness of the data. For that reason, I decided to include an online open-ended question survey as an additional method for data collection. With a combination of observations, in-depth interviews, and the online survey, a satisfactory image was created of the visitors, their behaviour, and experiences and how they interact with nature.

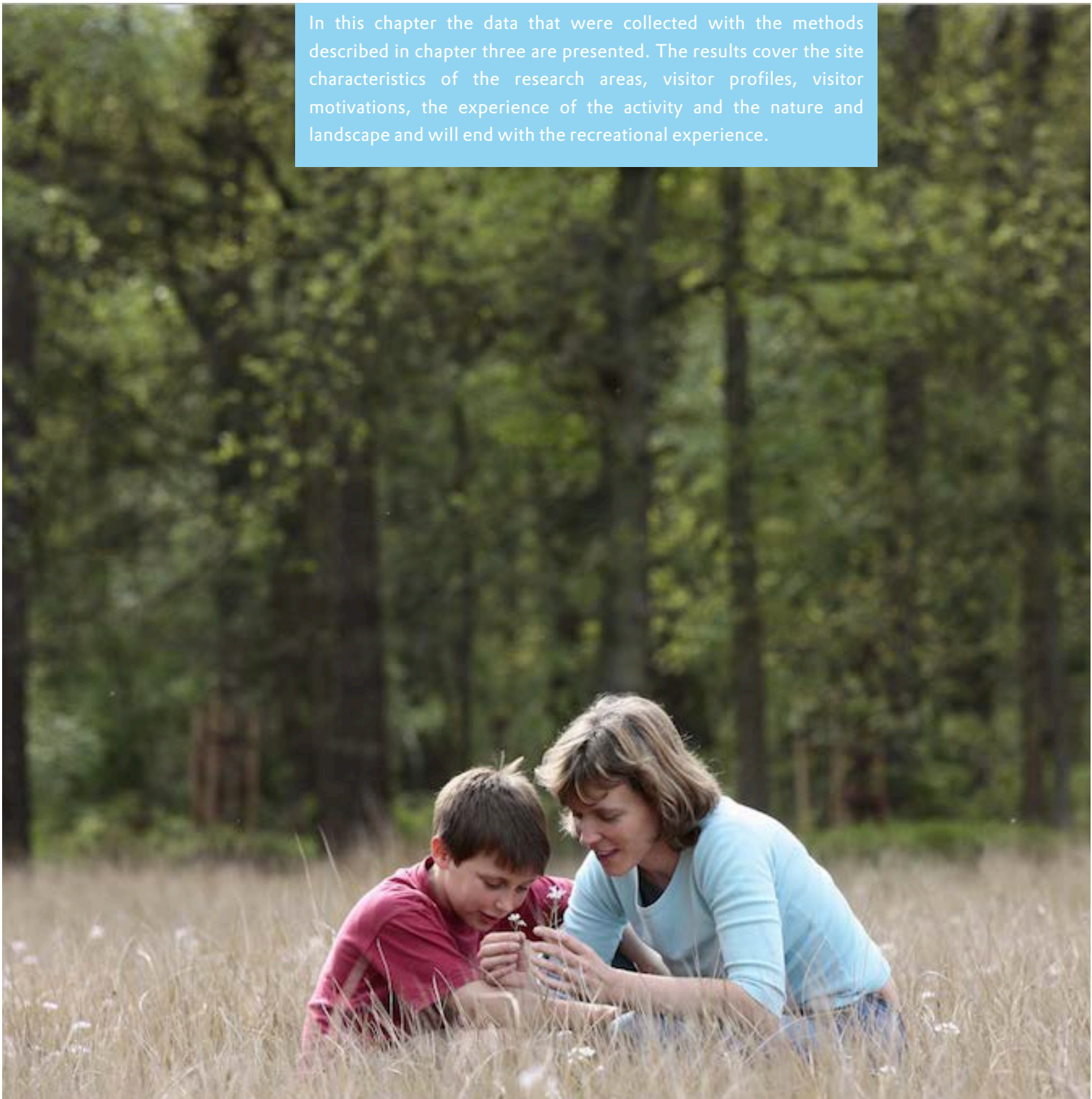
The difficulties mentioned above were kept in mind during the data analysis. In the following chapter the results from the data that were collected with the aforementioned methods, are presented.



# 4

## Analysing experiences

In this chapter the data that were collected with the methods described in chapter three are presented. The results cover the site characteristics of the research areas, visitor profiles, visitor motivations, the experience of the activity and the nature and landscape and will end with the recreational experience.



## 4. Analysing experiences

In this chapter, the outcomes of the literature reviews, the interviews, observations and open-ended question surveys are put together in order to get a complete as possible image of the recreational experience visitors have in nature. The findings will be linked to existing empirical research and to the theoretical concepts discussed in chapter two. In comparing the empirical results of the study with the existing (empirical and theoretical) research results of other studies, it can be determined where the results of this research overlap with the existing research and on the other hand where this research brings forward new insights. First the structure of this chapter will be explained. Next, the results will be presented per case study.

The findings are structured around the four case studies used for this research. As stated in chapter two, by using different theoretical perspectives to research the cases, it is intended to paint a holistic picture of the visitors and their experiences in each of the researched natural areas. This way of presenting will be helpful to demonstrate the key differences and similarities between the results of the cases studies. Figure 4.1 gives an overview of the way in which the discussion of the results of each of the four case studies is structured.

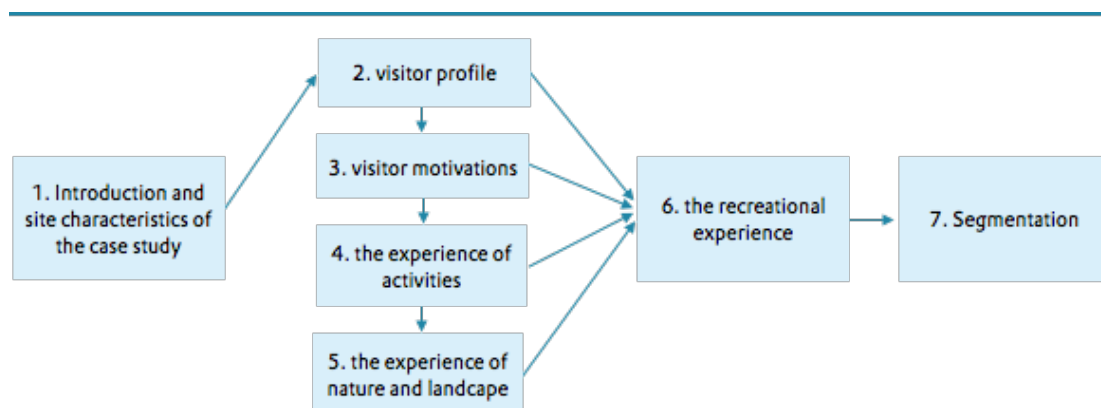


Figure 4.1 Overview of how the research data are presented per case-study

Every case study starts with an introduction of the research case. To be able to answer sub question four, 'what are the site characteristics?' the site characteristics such as their features, facilities and policies will be described (point 1 in figure 4.1). These results have been collected by means of nature area specific reports from Natuurmonumenten. The next step is that the elements that influence the visitor-experience are discussed (2,3,4 and 5 in figure 4.1).

As the conceptual framework (figure 2.4) suggests, the visitor experience is influenced by the lifestyle and personal characteristics of the visitor; motivations and perceptions of the visitor; the activities the recreationists do and the tangible and intangible assets of the natural setting. All together they influence the way an individual experiences his/her free time in nature. Therefore, after the introduction of the research case (point 1), first the results of *who* is visiting the nature are presented in a visitor profile (2). The demographics that are used for these profiles are gained from the interviews and the surveys. These demographics will be compared with the demographics of the local inhabitants to check whether the respondent-visitors are representative of the population of locals living nearby the research areas. Then it will be examined *why* these people are visiting the natural area, by describing their motivations for recreation into nature, and more specifically, the research area (3). The next part of the results represents the influence of the activity on the visitor experience

(4), followed by an overview of how people actually experience the nature and landscape (5). Together, these outcomes provide an answer to for sub question four, concerning the connection between the site characteristics and the visitor experience. By bringing together site-specific empirical information with the experiences of the visitors, a holistic image of the recreational experience can be created (6). Eventually, the possibilities for segmentation according to lifestyle groups (chapter two) are examined. A map of every research area is available in Appendix IV.

In this chapter, quotes of respondents are used to clarify and support the results. All quotes are translations by the author. The author took the majority of pictures that are used in this chapter. These pictures were taken during the period of November and December 2014. Pictures from other photographers are referenced.



## 4.1 Naional Park Zuid-Kennemerland







In this part, the case study of Zuid-Kennemerland will be described starting with the site characteristics. The circle in figure 4.1 (on the right) shows of which step in the structure the results are presented. Please keep this figure in mind when going through the results.



National Park Zuid-Kennemerland (ZK) is located in the Dutch province Noord-Holland (NH) (see figure 4.2). Next to historical estates, forest, dunes and dune lakes there are also peat polders and a natural sea with beaches. More than hundred species of birds, deer, rabbits, butterflies but also wild horses, Shetlands and Scottish Highlanders live in this natural environment (Brekers, 2014). The area enjoys the presence of the only Dutch herd of European bison. Because of the grazing of most animals, many colourful mosses, herbs and flowers can be found. Without the animals, the dunes would be a hilly plain with only dune reed. Characteristic for this national park is the varying flora and fauna and the estates that cannot be found in surrounding areas (Vereniging Natuurmonumenten & Terra Lannoo, 2011).

### A quick overview of National Park Zuid-Kennemerland

- 3. 800 hectares of which 1.174 hectares along the coast between Ijmuiden and Zandvoort.
- Everyone is free to walk on the roads and paths.
- Duin en Kruidbergerweg 74, Santpoort-Noord
- Walkable from stations Santpoort Noord, Driehuis en Overveen.
- Walking and biking routes present
- Horseback riding track present. Tandem ride required.
- Dogs are not allowed, also not when leashed.
- Visitor center, Zeeweg 12 Overveen
- Presence of spectacular lookouts, bird watch cabins and picnic tables




Figure 4.2 Overview National Park Zuid-Kennemerland

## Natuurmonumenten

This nature area has a special management construction that is different from many other properties of Natuurmonumenten. The management of Zuid-Kennemerland is not only in the hands of the association. The managing board consists of representatives of the province of Noord-Holland, the surrounding municipalities of Haarlem, Velzen, Bloemendaal and Zandvoort, PWN (waterworks company Noord-Holland), Staatsbosbeheer, Natuurmonumenten, IVN (Institute for nature education and sustainability) and private owners (J. de Vegte, personal communication, November 19, 2014). Natuurmonumenten is the owner of the estates in the park, named Duin en Kruidberg, Midden-Herenduin, Heerenduinen and Koningshof (Brekers, 2014; Natuurmonumenten, 2014i).

## Facilities

The national park has multiple entrances. Almost all entrances are accessible by car. The main entrance can be found in the middle of the park. A visitor centre is located at the main entrance, together with a parking lot, a play garden and a café for coffee and lunch (figure 4.3). At the visitor

centre, one can obtain information about the national park and its recreation routes. It is possible to learn about the park in an interactive manner. By means of a touch screen visitors can explore different areas of the park (see figure 4.4); by squeezing into a scented bottle one can smell the scents of the park; and by touching the flora on a display one can feel the different kinds of plants present in the park.



Figure 4.3 Visitor centre ZK



Figure 4.4 Touch screen



Figure 4.5 Entrance Duin- en Kruidberg

The choice has been made to conduct the research around the property Duin- en Kruidberg because that is the main entrance of the grounds managed by Natuurmonumenten (figure 4.5). This entrance is equipped with an unpaved parking lot, an information panel and bicycle stand. At the opposite side of the entrance, a small restaurant is located. Nearby the entrance a luxury hotel is situated hosting a restaurant where park users can also enjoy refreshments. Within the National Park, 27 kilometres of paths for pedestrians are laid out, of which 18 kilometres are marked routes with both paved and unpaved paths. There are also 7.5 kilometres of biking paths and 2.5 kilometres of horse riding tracks. These data were collected in 2012, and in the meanwhile more paths have been constructed. The exact number of picnic tables, benches and other resting places is unknown. However during observations, numerous benches were seen as well as one picnic table. Halfway the paved path that goes from the entrance of Duin- en Kruidberg almost straight to the beach (Zeeweg), a water tap is located. People, as well as animals, make thankful use of this point. Next to the paths, eight observation points have been created. Some of them are located at the lakes where birds can be spotted. Others provide a beautiful view over a part of the national park. There are also different information panels located in the park, amongst other at the observations points. They provide an explanation of the flora and fauna of the park (Logemann & Voskuil, 2001). Along one of the smaller walking routes, a QR-tour has been generated. Little pillars with a QR-code and a small explanation can be found along the route. This route is especially focused on children. Recently a work and meeting place called 'De Bosuil' (in English: the tawny owl) was created, suitable for hosting a maximum of thirty people (figure 4.6). An old farm at ten to fifteen minutes walking distance from the entrance of Duin- en Kruidberg was turned into an enjoyable place to have workshops or work meetings. It also allows for office space for the local foresters, who provide approximately 50 excursions per year. Most recently a story trail was created, where people could walk along with a forester and hear all the stories of the area. Other excursions involve a forest walk in combination with a high tea in the local restaurant, a walk in the dark along the dunes and a scavenger hunt to toads. Most of the activities of Natuurmonumenten require a participation fee ranging from 3 to 29 euro. Members of the association get a discount on the excursions (Natuurmonumenten, 2014a).



Figure 4.6 De Bosuil



Figure 4.7 Path for pedestrians

### Recreation and recreation policy

As stated above, the park provides many kilometres of walking (figure 4.7), biking and horseback riding paths. Yearly circa two million people visit the park. 84% of the visitors come from areas that are situated nearby. The user groups most present, according to the foresters, are the pedestrians, mostly aged fifty years or older. Previous research conducted by the counsel of the national park showed that recreationists value the park with an 8.2 (on a scale from one to ten), and more than 90% re-visit the park. People can follow their own plan or participate in one of the many activities that are organised for individuals, groups, schools and companies. Volunteers and locals involved in the park use communication tools including a park newsletter, the visitor centre, exhibitions, an excursion programme, volunteer evenings and visitor evenings (Brekers, 2014).

Sustainability is firmly stated in the agenda of the National Park. A good balance between ecological, economic and social interests is deemed essential. All the involved partners will comply with and execute the future policy. The recreation policy targets on pedestrians, bikers, trimmers, horse(women) and families with children. Facilities will be designed addressing their wishes. Zoning is used to reduce crowding issues. In order to get more public support for zoning, supplementary information about why areas are zoned will be provided in the near future. A plan is developed to undertake additional measures to reduce crowding problems. In this plan, emphasis is placed on lessening the ambient noise of others so that people have the possibility to better enjoy nature. More foresters will be employed to reduce the number of undesired night visitors. Because of the ambitiousness of the policy, alternative sources of finances must be attracted in the form of volunteers, entrepreneurs, governments and local inhabitants. Most projects can only be completed when opportunities arise, which makes long-term planning difficult (Brekers, 2014; Logemann & Voskuil, 2001).

### Cultural heritage

Cultural heritage from different historical periods is present in the national park. Most noticeable are the estates, water extraction buildings, and archaeological sites and places that remind of WWII such as bunkers along the dune line and a cemetery that honours the victims of the war. During archaeological excavations, valuable farm maps were found originating from the fifth century. This considerable variation makes the area interesting and valuable from a cultural-historical point of view (NRIT Onderzoek, 2008).

The future aim is to create an even better relation between the cultural-historical elements and the nature and landscape. This means that the cultural heritage of the park must become more visible. Also, efforts are made to become a participant of the 'Open Monumentendag' (In English: Open monument day) of Natuurmonumenten. To be able to protect the value of the cultural heritage in a better way, it is necessary to transfer the maintenance of cultural heritage of each of the individual managers, towards an overarching combined management-collective where all the different managers involved collaborate (Brekers, 2014).

### Nature policy

More than 660 plant species and more than 100 types of birds are counted in the park. A diverse collection of insects inhabits the park too. The park is part of Natura2000 as it carries valuable nature. The majority of the projects that are part of the future policy have the aim to improve nature. The primary focus is on strengthening the biodiversity and the natural dynamics of the park. This will be accomplished by meeting the rules and regulations of Natura2000, maintenance and management of valuable coniferous forests and the creation of an ecoduct so that fauna can pass across the railway and the Zeeweg (Brekers, 2014)

### Lifestyle segmentation

As indicated in the methodology, the choice of the research areas was amongst other based on the surrounding inhabitants. The lifestyle atlas of Noord-Holland shows that a high presence of the modest aqua lifestyle segment lives around the National Park (see figure 4.8). The percentage of the modest aqua lifestyle group around the park is substantially higher than the average percentage of the aqua group in the Netherlands as well as in the province. Especially in Bloemendaal and Heemstede the presence of the aqua group is high: their share is 33 and 35 percent compared to the 17 percent at a national level and 19 percent on a provincial level. Also in Zandvoort, located on the left of figure 4.8, 31 percent of the inhabitants are in the aqua segment. Haarlem, one of the bigger cities in the province, contains an aqua group of 25 percent.

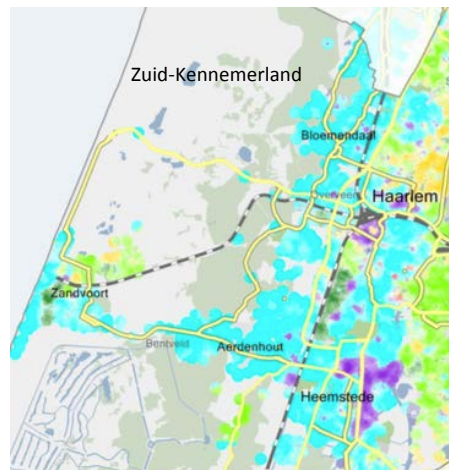


Figure 4.8 Lifestyles surrounding ZK (SmartAgent, 2012)

Above a description of the site characteristics of Zuid-Kennemerland was given. This section now continues with looking at the visitors and their experiences in this research area.

### Visitor profile

The visitor profile specifically looks at the 'who' part; who are the participants that visited Zuid-Kennemerland? These results were based on the data of the interviews and the surveys, as well the observations. Two pedestrians and one horsewoman were interviewed in Zuid-Kennemerland. Next to that, a total of 13 surveys were filled out in this area. The collected data showed that 87 percent of the visitors lived within a thirty-minute travel distance from the park. The people who live nearby visited the area frequently while the visitors from further away predominantly visited the area for the first time or only once or twice a year. During the observations, it was noticed that there was no dominant group of users present. The visitors included a mix of families with young children, fanatic athletes and older couples. Visitors that were approached during the research days, where often very willing to share their opinions and experiences. The average age of the participants was 47 years. This is higher than the average age of the inhabitants that live nearby the national park (inhabitants of the south of the province Noord-Holland). The average age in this part of the province is 42 (Provincie Noord Holland, 2014). A gender balance was evident as just over half of the participants were female. These statistics mirror the numbers of the province (CBS - Bevolkingsstatistiek, 2013). Furthermore, it was also asked with whom participants were visiting the park. 19 Percent of the people went into a nature area by themselves. The other 81 percent that visited the national park was accompanied by at least one other person. 25 Percent brought their children and 56 percent were visiting the area accompanied by other adults. The statistics of the surrounding inhabitants show that 23 percent of

the households are cohabiting with children. 69 Percent of the households are cohabiting or single households (CBS - Huishoudensstatistiek, 2013). When comparing the percentages of the participants with the statistics of the surroundings, they are relatively similar. This can also easily be seen in figure 4.9. Therefore it can be concluded that the research population can be regarded as a representative sample for the surrounding inhabitants.

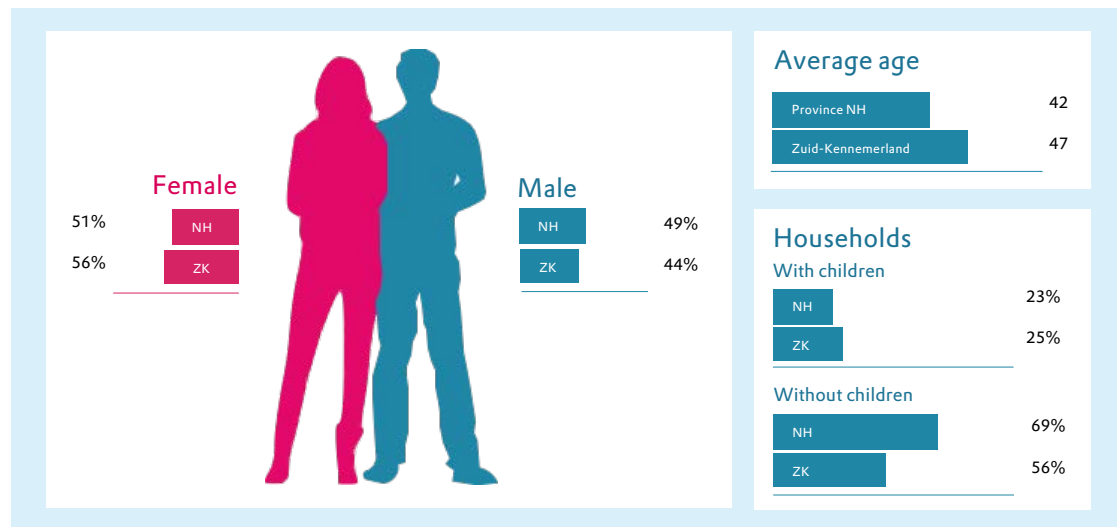


Figure 4.9 Comparing statistics of Zuid-Kennemerland with province Noord-Holland

## Visitor motivations

After looking at *who* the visitors are, now it will be reported *why* people visit the National Park. This was done by looking at the visitors' motivations. By means of reviewing the available literature, it was determined that motivations of visitors may change over time (see chapter two). Due to time limitations, a longitudinal study did not allow to research motivations over time. It was, however, possible to capture the motivations the visitors had at the moment of the fieldwork. Commonly suggested motivations for recreating outdoors included relaxation, escape, association with friends, and learning. One of the motivations that was similar to a motivation that came forward from the literature review was relaxation. This was often expressed in ways such as: "We just wanted to relax" (woman, 46); "I wanted to experience the peace and serenity. I was looking for a calm environment to relax and empty the mind" (man, 36).

When people were asked what relaxing actually meant for them, they often named a second motivation; escape. This motive also corresponds with the reviewed literature. For example, a 36-year-old man was motivated to go into nature because of "a combination of the cold, the wind and the space around me. In the city, the peace and serenity is missing, and the cities often lack the horizon". Another man (24) said: "All week I am inside at the office behind a computer. It is very relieving when the weather is good to go outside and get some fresh air". Not being disturbed by other people, or avoid interpersonal pressure was an important aspect for people who came from a city. People seek a way out of their busy lives and daily routines by visiting nature. They were looking for the absence of strict timetables, seeking for relaxation, to escape from their busy lives.

Another motivation conforming to the ones in the theoretical framework is the association with friends: "A nice walk also gives the possibility to catch up" (woman, 54); "I wanted to catch up with my girlfriend. We are both busy during week days and we do not take the time to catch up in the weekends" (man, 24); "Both of us are caregivers and regularly need a walk to catch up. We are also



here to enjoy the nature and to 'reload our battery'. Of course we also really enjoy walking, and it keeps you fit" (woman, 46). These participants see nature as a place where you can spend time together and pay attention to one another. Something they do, or cannot create time while being at home or at work.

Next to the above motivations that parallel the motives mentioned in the literature, visitors came with a range of other reasons to visit nature. Firstly, the feeling of freedom that nature provides, motivated several visitors of Zuid-Kennemerland to come to the natural area: "It does not depend on how much I enjoy the things I can do in nature, for example, to go into the woods with my horse, but the feeling of freedom... that is what makes it special" (woman, 48); "You are outside and in nature, then no one -especially other family members- can disturb you... you can speak freely" (woman, 46). As these quotes show, nature is a place where one can feel free, where people can do things without being disturbed by others. Another popular motivation for coming to the area that was not commonly noted in literature, was the motivation to enjoy the season: "It is so lovely to go outside and enjoy the fresh autumn air and the beautiful colours the season brings" (woman, 55); "We wanted to collect the beautiful coloured leaves and chestnuts that fell from the trees to make a nice autumn piece for at home. Next to that we enjoy to search for different types of mushrooms" (woman, 55); "I came to photograph the mushrooms" (woman, 35). These quotes illustrate how people are attracted by nature because of the attractive elements of the destination. According to (Yoon & Uysal, 2005) this can be characterised as pull factors. The other motivations named above are based on elements that 'push' people away from their homes and daily routines. These can, therefore, be characterised as push factors. During the observations, it was noticed that many visitors admired the different kinds of mushrooms. It was possible to see visitors smile and point at the mushrooms when someone found one. Most of the elements that autumn brings, such as the different kinds of mushrooms, cannot be found in the nearby living environment. However, people do want to experience the autumn and are therefore motivated to visit a natural area where the season presents itself in its full glory.

There was also the motivation for physical exercise: "We are here to get some exercise with the whole family. With these rainy days we easily tend to sit inside all weekend" (woman, 41); "I am here to train for my marathon. This area provides a good training environment as there are different challenging hills, and the heavy sand from the beach" (man, 36). These visitors go into nature for physical exercise and to stay fit. This corresponds with Guinn's (1980) arguments on recreational motivations. Furthermore, a research of the ANWB (2013) showed that people experience moments of happiness when recreating in the forest. This could explain why people prefer to exercise in a natural area.

### **Motivations for visiting Zuid-Kennemerland**

In the previous paragraph I examined why the visitors of Zuid-Kennemerland visited natural environments. Now I will discuss why the visitors specifically chose for Zuid-Kennemerland.

The majority of the participants said to choose for Zuid-Kennemerland because it was located nearby. When these people were asked to name a second reason, most of them answered that they enjoyed the diversity of the area, they appreciated the beautiful nature that they do not have in their direct environment. Especially people who lived near the coast were also walking in the forest area, as they liked to have some alternation. The other reasons can be divided into two categories. Firstly, active athletes went to Zuid-Kennemerland as it is a suitable and challenging training area because of its hills, different kinds of paths and the beach. Secondly, the ones who chose to have a peaceful walk in the park often specifically came to see the animals.

To summarise, when comparing the motivations of the visitors of Zuid-Kennemerland with the motivations from the literature, it can be concluded that the motivations that came forward from this research were only partly identical to the ones proposed in relevant literature. Namely, the motivations of relaxing, escaping and association with friends were similar, and, in addition, many other motivations were also mentioned such as the feeling of freedom and to enjoy the season. Noticeably, as one already may have seen from the results above, in the results it did not come forward that people visited nature to learn about nature. The results from this cases study show that the theoretically possible motivations to visit the natural area do not entirely correspond to the empirical reality.

### **Comparing motivations with the visitor profile**

When comparing the demographics of the visitor profile with the above-discussed motivations, only a few significant relations came forward. It was found that men more often than women were visiting a natural area to stay fit while women more often paid a visit to catch up. There was no significant difference found between age and motivation. To clarify, the motivations of for example staying fit and enjoying the season, were mentioned as often by the elderly couples as with the families with young children. However, one exception concerns the motivation of escape. Predominantly visitors below the age of 54 argued that this was an important motivation for them to visit Zuid-Kennemerland. Also, no differences were found in the distance people had to travel to the National Park and their motivation.

### **The experience of activities**

I observed different outdoor activities in Zuid-Kennemerland. The most popular activity seemed to be walking, as this activity was most often witnessed. As suggested in the existing literature, the same activity (e.g. walking) can have different meanings (Buijs, et al., 2006). One individual may enjoy nature by smelling and gathering flowers while the other individual enjoys nature by watching wildlife during the walk. This was also confirmed by the observations; people walked and at the same time played hide and seek, photographed, some climbed the trees or gathered leaves and other natural objects. Quotes from the interviews show that people watched the animals during their walk, and others did some photographing: “We went for a walk because it seemed like a fun activity for the small ones as it gave the opportunity to look at the animals. And in this way you can make a dull Sunday cosy and happy” (woman, 28); “Walking helps to stretch the legs, and also makes it easy to photograph birds and mushrooms” (man, 71).

Another activity I often observed was running. Some people were running in the form of walking fast or jogging, while others brought it to the extreme, with intervals, or trained for a long run: “I was training for a half marathon” (man, 36); “I especially jogged, with walking in between to get some rest and to have a chat with my trimming partner” (man, 41). These quotes clearly show the different aims people have while doing the same ‘objective’ activity. The 36-year-old man had the goal to improve his running skills so that he could participate in a competition run. The 41-year-old man who went jogging rather did that to stay fit and to catch up with his friend.

Another commonly observed activity was horseback riding. Also different groups of mountain bikers and (e-)bikers were spotted. It was not observed that people went swimming in the sea, but this can be explained by the autumn like weather conditions.

The respondents were also asked why they chose for a particular activity rather than another activity. One of the main reasons for people to go out for a walk was because they feel more mobile by foot than by bike. To exemplify:

“The nice thing about strolling is that when you walk around it is very nice to take another route or a site path. You are not stuck to the paved paths or can even leave the path. Also, it is easy to stand still and enjoy the surroundings, or have a closer look at things. If you are cycling you first have to get off the bike, and lock it when you want to explore something. Also, you need to find a place to put your bike. And you can not go anywhere you want with your bike.” – woman, 54 –

Walking rather than biking seemed to provide more freedom. A bike is an object that you need to take care of and pay attention to. Guests from further away and families often did not choose to bring their bikes:

“I also would like to bike in this area, but it is too much effort to take the bikes with us at the back of the car or in the train. Even though there are possibilities to rent bikes or take OV-bikes, we did not want to pay for them as we already had to pay the travel expenses.” – man, 24 –

Another women (46) argued: “It is quite an undertaking to get all the children on the bikes, and control where they are going. Especially when you also have a small one on your own bike. It is less effort just to have a walk”. There were also people who usually bike when recreating outdoors, but found the national park much more suitable for walking. Most of the runners went out for a run to stay fit. They did not find enough challenge in walking or biking. One of the survey respondents explained that he was not experienced with mountain biking and felt not skilled enough. Another respondent noted that he would be interested in mountain biking, but he did not know the mountain bike rules and regulations and the possible routes he could ride. Horsewomen indicated that getting out in the forest by horse was a pleasant alternation in their daily training and good for relaxation.

Moving towards what people experience during their activity, it was suggested that experiences differ as individuals look for different functions, or participate in different activities in diverse areas (Buijs, et al., 2006) (chapter 2). Specifically the runners had a clear goal; the nature area had to function as a challenging training ground to test their skills. They were looking for an area that challenged them. The height differences, diverse paths and the dunes at the beach were perceived as stimulating circumstances for trimmers. However, when trimmers were asked what contributed to their experience in nature, they often stated that nature helped them to focus on their task: “After running for a while I start to flow into a dreamy state because of the fresh sea air and the nature around me. When I flow in this state, it makes the running very easy and enjoyable” (man, 54); “The pure environment helps me to come in a trance” (man, 47). These quotes indicate that the nature helps them to fulfil their training needs in a mentally and emotionally pleasant way. They indeed seem to get ‘the flow of experience’ as described by Hayllar (2003). The trance helps them to do the right things without thinking. The physical tiredness after the run is not experienced as negative but it rather positively contributes to a persons’ wellbeing and a satisfied state afterward. As described by Gelter (2000), tiredness does not play a role when the body and the mind get harmonised, and a state of flow is reached. Horse riders also had experiences that were coming close to ‘flow’:

“I find horseback riding in nature a very nice manner to enjoy nature. I enjoy nature extra when I am on my horse actually. It adds up, like an extra dimension, especially in this area where there are all kinds of other animals present. I also often say ‘I am going on a safari.’ And because you are on your horse, you can also come really close to the animals.” – woman, 54 –

Other horse riders that responded to the survey indicated to have similar experiences. It was, however, the case that a distinction between the self and the environment was still kept. The horse paths were not very well maintained which made it hard to ride without paying close attention where the horse should walk. Having to pay attention to how to move seems, in this case, to be the point of

resistance between coming into a flow or not. For the rest, all the ingredients are there for the horsewomen to come into a flow. When looking at the concept of recreation specialization of Manning (2010) it can be argued that horseback riders are often well equipped and have good horseback riding skills. At the moment people enter nature on a horse while they never had a ride on a horse, dangerous situations can appear. Manning argues that less skilled and less well-equipped visitors also have different experiences than skilled and well-equipped visitors. This clearly came forward in the activity of walking. In terms of equipment, during the rainy autumn days, hiking boots were not a luxury. The muddy unpaved paths were, therefore, less often used, or people experienced wet feet. In terms of skills, many people did not walk on a regular basis. Also, as discussed above, especially the pedestrians had many different motives for the same activity. People who visited the area to catch up during their walk were often not very demanding regarding the area itself, except that it is a nice environment to have a walk:

“During my walk I pay more attention to the person next to me, rather than the nature around me, that is more in the background. It is, however, important that the area is clean and provides a safe environment where you do not have to pay attention to where you walk all the time.” – woman, 42 –

People who walked to stay fit distinguished more elements that where necessary for them to have a nice experience in nature: “It was nice that there were no dogs around, in this way you are less disturbed” (man, 24); “The paths must be easily accessible, and the environment must look as natural as possible” (woman, 41); “There must be a variation in the sorts of paths” (woman, 55). In general, the requirements that needed to be encountered according to the visitors in order to have a positive walking experience in nature were often not perfectly met. In other words, they had certain expectations that were not fully satisfied. This explains why the pedestrians describe their experience of the activity as a ‘pleasurable’ experience, but no indication of experiences of flow was detected: “The activity of walking helps you to relax. The good weather and the nice autumn colours contribute to this” (woman, 55); “During the walk you get a feeling of relaxation, also the nature has a relaxing effect on people which makes you pleased and happy” (woman, 41); “The walk and the serenity of nature gave us the feeling that we had all the time of the world to catch up” (man, 24). These quotes show that also within a certain activity, people can have different experiences.

Manning (2010) also reports that specialised visitors have more highly developed preferences than less-specialised visitors. However, it seems this theory does reflect the empirical reality as the pedestrians were the ones that had a lot of supportive suggestions on all kinds of subjects, while the horse(women) and the runners rather had smaller suggestions that helped to avoid irritations. For example, the horsewomen indicated they were very happy that there are routes available for horse riding in the area, however, the routes are not maintained very well, which creates dangerous situations (i.e. branches in the eye, and horses tripping over the tree roots). Hinds & Sparks (2008) also discussed the level of specialisation and argued that there are differences in attitudes towards the natural environment by specialisation level. Even though participants were not explicitly asked for their environmental attitudes, it was clear that the more specialised visitors knew more about the local nature and its structure, and therefore also better understood how the area needed to be maintained or improved.

A frequently occurring problem during experiencing nature was crowding. Almost all users experienced issues of crowding during their visit. Two couples that went walking in the ‘outskirts’ of the area were the only exceptions. Many respondents indicated that the presence of many other visitors in the area had an influence on the experience during their activity. During the observations, it also became very clear that people were bothered by each other, and sometimes even unsafe situations appeared. Especially families suggested that nature must be a safe environment to recreate

in. Young children do not always walk or bike in a strict line, and they need some extra space. This, however, was not always the case due to crowding issues. I noticed that many different user groups use the same paved path, while on the other unpaved (but also accessible) paths hardly anyone was seen. A child unexpectedly ran away to grab something from the ground and it almost got run over by a mountain biker who was cycling very fast. Many people indicated that they were actually irritated by the fact there were so many people. For example: “During my walk I had to pay attention continuously to see if I was enough on the side of the road to prevent being hit by cyclists and mountain bikers. This was not very relaxing. It hold me back from fully enjoying the nature” (woman, 54); “We are often disturbed by the cyclists who impatiently ring so that they can pass by. This intrudes our walk; we need to look at the children nonstop because they cannot walk freely” (woman, 28); “When I ride on my horse it is sometimes very dangerous if screaming children are running by, or when there are trimmers on the riding tracks. It can scare the horses and create dangerous situations” (woman, 48). Crowding does not only create unsafe situations and irritations, it also has a negative impact on how people experience nature. More people together create more noise, which scares the animals away that some people especially came to look for. Also, people missed ‘the sound of silence’.

To summarise, the ultimate experience is seen when someone becomes in the aforementioned ‘flow’. It was discussed that runners experience this flow. According to the theory, they should have a very satisfying experience. Interesting is that when the trimmers were asked, ‘what could Natuurmonumenten do to improve their experience in Zuid-Kennemerland?’, indeed not one of them had recommendations. They were happy the way it was, which indicates that a flow experience equals a very satisfying experience. On the other hand, visitors that practiced an activity without having an experience of ‘flow’ always had suggestions on what could be done better. They also reported more problems with crowding issues than the runners.

### **Comparing the activities with the visitor profile**

Horseback riding was only done by women while predominantly men were spotted running and mountain biking. Walking and biking was mainly done by couples. When looking at age, it was clear that biking was predominantly done by elderly. The more ‘active’ activities such as mountain biking and running were mainly participated by visitors younger than 50. Walking as well as horseback riding was popular amongst all ages. Characteristic of the people that came from further away is that they all went walking in the area. As discussed above, this was mainly because of practical reasons. All the participants that did horseback riding were the owner of a horse that was stabled along the border of the National Park. In the interview with a horsewoman who weekly visits Zuid-Kennemerland, it was however stated that sometimes people from further away take their horse to the beach with a trailer, to have a ride there. People who walked or biked were in most cases accompanied by others. Recognisable was that biking was mainly done by two people, while pedestrians sometimes were walking in big groups, usually families. Mountain biking was often done in groups of friends, rather than family. Running was often done as a solo activity.

### **The experience of nature & landscape**

The Kaplans (1998) and Bell (2008) stress the importance of the environmental setting in the visitor experience. The visual aspects or the scenic beauty of an area has a leading role in how individuals experience nature and landscape (de Vries, 2009). De Vries suggested that people prefer forests and value an area that reflects the historical character of a place. Contrary to these theoretical suggestions, the visitors of Zuid-Kennemerland, however, indicated that they most valued the variation in the landscapes that the area offers. The visitors often explicitly stated that this is one of the main attractive points the area offers. To give an impression of the many quotes about the



variation in nature: “The combination of dunes, forest and sea makes this the ideal nature area for us. Free parking is also an advantage” (woman, 42); “The variation in forest, moorland, open spaces and sea make this area so special” (woman, 54); “You start in the forest from the entrance of Duin- and Kruidberg and the nature slowly transforms from moorland to dunes and to sea. Very beautiful” (man, 36). People see the diversity as a unique feature of Zuid-Kennermerland. It is something special that positively contributes to their experience. Another visual element that was often reported by the participants was the chance to see animals. The presence of the animals was also one of the features that according to the participants, made the area special and memorable. It was often expected and looked forward to, to see a Scottish highlander or a Konik horse. These expectations were often so high that people became disappointed when these animals were not seen along the way: “I find it very special that there is a chance that you can come across Scottish highlanders. I was looking forward to that. Unfortunately I did not see them, which was quite a pity” (woman, 54). People enjoyed the area because there is a chance to see game. When one was asked what made it possible to immerse in nature, it was also the presence of the animals that was most often said. For example: “The places where the Scottish highlanders are often present, give a beautiful image and give you the idea you are far away from home. It is always surprising but also amazing when you see them” (woman, 41).

Even though the subject of animals did not come forward very explicitly in every interview, the presence of animals seemed to play a significant role in the experience no matter what activity was practiced. The presence of faeces on paths also created a certain curiosity. People who came across faeces often indicated that they had the feeling that an animal may be nearby, and they got excited. Especially the pedestrians went looking for the animals. When people all of a sudden walked into an animal, or suddenly saw them grazing in an area, they were often positively distracted from their activity. For example a 46-year-old man who was trimming to practice for a long run said:

“This is only the third time I came here. I knew there were many animals present in the area but the other two times I only saw faeces on the path and some birds. Today I came across a group of Scottish Highlanders with on the background, on a higher hill behind the Highlanders, a group of fallow deer. It was so beautiful and peaceful that I had to stop for a second to have a look”.

This quote perfectly illustrates the idea of ‘focus on nature’, as stated by Knopf (1987). This 46-year old man was firstly focusing on his activity of running. But the beautiful view of the animals, the amazement of the scene and the fact that he finally saw the animals at the third visit, made him stop and enjoy the moment by simply watching the animals. His focus shifted from activity to nature. At least three-quarters of the other visitors that participated in the research indicated that during their visit they had at least one moment that they were fully immersed in nature or had a focus on nature. When I asked how the visitors got this focus, the most common answers were because of the animals or when special natural events were spotted such as mushrooms or special lighting between the trees. Particularly for the autumn season, mushrooms being present in the area were seen as something special, exciting, taking the attention of the visitor: people experienced amazement. Except for one older couple, there was no one else who paid a visit to look for specific plants or animals. A quarter of the respondents could not fully immerse into nature because of several reasons. Two of them indicated that usually most moments during their visit the focus is on nature, but they got distracted. For example: “I was too often distracted to immerse into nature, because it was too busy. All the time I had to pay attention to where I had to walk in order to not walk into other pedestrians or cyclists” (woman 54). The other participants were simply focusing on other points of attention, such as their company. There was only one man who indicated that he was too busy with his own thoughts so that he did not pay much attention to his surroundings. Others were focusing on their task: “Running is too intensive to pay attention to nature. When you take it slow, like jogging

and/or walking, this is easier” (man, 36). As indicated by Knopf's theory (1987), more than one experiential mode can be dominant during the experience. This was most often identified with the people who were walking in Zuid-Kennemerland, accompanied by someone else. Their focus was predominantly on others, but also on their activity and nature.

Next to the visual aspects of Zuid-Kennemerland, Medway (2015) argued that the ‘non-seeing’ senses also provide valuable information about the environment, subconsciously influencing what people find of an area and how they experience it. It is different per individual how these sensations are interpreted, depending on past experience and the frame of reference (Porteous, 1990). Respondents, however, found it hard to translate what they were sensing into words. Sometimes they did not even notice that their senses were triggered; it happened without noticing. The observations, however, helped to see what people were sensing. It was for example observed that people really used their senses in order to find the mushrooms. The wet leaves on the ground had a special ‘autumn’ smell. Multiple comments were made on the beautiful colours of trees that were seen. The sense of touch and taste was hardly stated. It was, however, observed that many people were picking up leaves from the ground, or chestnuts and acorns. Especially the children simply picked them up to see how they looked like and how their skin felt. Afterwards, they dropped them on the ground again. As Porteous (1990) states, the senses of taste and touch are less often experienced within the landscape. In this study area this is mainly the case for taste. The results show that most of the visitor's senses are triggered in the area, especially by the elements that autumn brings. People, however, often experience them without knowing.

The Kaplans (1998) introduce the preference matrix that looks at four preferred design elements of an area: coherence, complexity, legibility and mystery, which could have an important influence on the experience (chapter 2). Regarding coherence, visitors gave back the impression that the area is well ordered. People were able to find their way, especially regular visitors. Only first-time visitors studied the map at the entrance and looked carefully for the signs of the route they were walking. It was observed that first-time, as well as regular visitors, were looking for the paths as they were entirely covered with leaves during the period of the fieldwork. This also caused one family to take the wrong path for the route they were following. Particularly for the horse(wo)men, there is no possibility of getting lost; there is only one dedicated path, and the path is recognisable and clearly indicated by signs. As confirmed by a 48-year-old-woman: “There are people who go into the area by horse for the first time. They are uncertain because they are afraid to get lost. And then we always say that you cannot get lost because there are not that many options”.

In terms of complexity, people were very satisfied with the diversity in plants and animals the area offered. Especially with the autumn season there were more mushroom species to look at which made the park even more ‘complex’. Four regular visitors indicated that every season brings something new to look at in this area. Also, the dunes change regularly because of the sea wind. This altogether makes that there is always something next, something different to see in the area. Furthermore, numerous animals are present, and the different kinds of vegetation make it, according to the audience, a visually diverse area. To illustrate, an example of a pedestrian: “There are moments that it looks like you are walking through a kind of savannah, and then all of a sudden you are in the forest again. I also really favour the old dunes here” (woman, 42).

With regards to the legibility of Zuid-Kennemerland, it was also the variation in nature that people indicated as most memorable of the national park. There are not many nature areas that have forest and moorland as well as dunes and sea. It looks like all sorts of vegetation bring their own little places and atmosphere:

"The variation in nature is so nice here. The variation is... yes there are so many little places we have. There is some place we call 'little moon' that is such a nice little avenue, so fairy tale like. And there are many more little places of which I think 'oh it is so beautiful here'." – man, 54 –

Another man (24) states: “We ate our lunch on top of a fallen tree, in the sun relatively outside of the wind. That was a nice place. Along our way, we accidentally came across all kinds of different places, and those are especially the nice ones”. Other informants appreciated the area because Zuid-Kennemerland offers peace and serenity, while it is so closely situated to the busy cities of Haarlem and Amsterdam.

The fourth element of the preference matrix includes the extent of ‘mystery’. It was suggested that the area created some curiosity, such as this pedestrian: “You become more curious as you walk further, because the landscape constantly changes a little bit” (woman, 54). There are several cultural elements in the area such as bunkers and a water cellar. It was not possible to enter them, but by being able to peak through the leafs around the gates, there is a suggestion of wonderment and novelty, which enhances the sense of mystery. It gave suggestions of what might be in the bunker. The Kaplans also argue that mystery encourages people to further explore the scenes, which brings their focus more on the nature rather than on the activity or the other.

### Information and signing

Another influential element in the setting is the information that is provided about the area, the routes, and the route signing (Bell, 2008). The data showed that the information about user paths was unclear. At the Natuurmonumenten entrance of Duin- en Kruidberg, two paths can be taken. A small unpaved and a bigger paved path (see figure 4.5). It was observed that many first-time visitors doubted via which path they should enter the park. Besides, it was not clear whether the unpaved path took the same route as the paved path. The following quote from an interview with a pedestrian in the park can clarify the above stated:

“At the entrance there is a paved as well as an unpaved path. This is probably to divide the bikers from the pedestrians, but this is not clear. There was also a woman in a wheelchair. She thought she was only allowed to enter the unpaved path, and that the other path was only for cyclists.” – woman, 54 –



Figure 4.10 List of available marked trails in ZK

This instance of confusion is not a nice start of the experience in nature. Also, the information about the routes at the Natuurmonumenten entrance could be improved. As figure 4.10 shows, an enormous amount of routes is available, with some of them having the same colours. It is positive that there are so many routes available, but if the routes are not clearly indicated, and not well illustrated on a map, no one will make use of them. Besides, the information in figure 4.10 only provides the name and the length of the route. This makes it challenging for the visitors to make a distinction between the routes and it is hard for them to choose which route is most suitable for meeting their needs and expectations. For example:

“There may be a better indication of the various hiking trails on the information panel at the parking lot. Maybe a specific map for the routes that start at this entrance, and not of the whole park. Then you should take the car or the bike to go to another entrance. Next to that, I also want to see what is special about a trail, and what I can see along the way. I myself wanted to walk a route of Natuurmonumenten. The routes from the NM website were not indicated on the map at all, that is a pity. I think Natuurmonumenten certainly misses an opportunity there!” – woman, 54 –

As the visitors say themselves, it is an opportunity for the association that they miss out on. There is also a QR-code route in Zuid-Kennemerland, particularly made attractive for children. This QR-route is also not clearly indicated on the information panel at the Natuurmonumenten entrance. During the observations, it was not seen once that someone made use of the QR-codes. As a matter of fact, there was only one woman seen with a phone in her hand who was photographing a mushroom. For the rest, there was an absence of any technological devices. Four visitors indicated that they would also have enjoyed information at special places in the park. As Kaplan et al. (1998) argue, the main focus concerning the provisions of information must be in answering the needs of the visitors. It may be concluded that this is not the case; visitors seem to get the right information at the right time. So the first needs of the visitors, after they arrive at the area, are not met. The visitors are asking for the essentials at the entrance: detailed information about the routes, facilities and clear signing for which routes start where.

The overall communication is also a factor that can be improved. During the interviews, visitors often shared their suggestions for improvements, since they did not know how to share them with the local management. They do not know how to reach the local foresters, and in case they succeed, they feel they are not listened to. Also, changes in the area are made without clear communication with the frequent visitors:

“Sometimes we think, yes this is a really nice part to ride the horse. But then they spoil it by putting heavy sand on it. Of course, they do it to improve the area, but sometimes we think, ‘do they not think of us at all?’ Why do we not know this?.” – woman, 48 –

The same horsewoman indicated that there are sometimes signs with information about the construction works, but in many instances there was a lack of such information. To give another example from a pedestrian: “We always walk our standard route and all of a sudden they blocked the whole path without further route signing or information why this was happening. We got quite annoyed by this.” (woman, 46). When specifically focussing on route signing inside as well as outside the park, people experienced difficulties in finding the entrance of Duin- en Kruidberg:

“The signage could definitely be improved. Especially when you try to navigate to this entrance. This did not go well with us, and the same applies to more people. This came forward when we were putting on our walking shoes, and someone asked us ‘hey do you know how we can get there and there? Afterward, we were crossing a couple and heard them say, ‘where is the board with all the hiking trails?’ Later on, when we accidentally took a detour, it appeared that at the entrance of the parking lot, there was a very small street with a very small sign that you could not see properly from the car. There should be a big P at the entrance.” – man, 24 –

Especially first and second-time visitors complained about the route signing. It was simply not clear for the pedestrians where routes started and where one should go along the route. There were no landmarks named that people could use as recognition points. One of the respondents even called the signing ‘complicated’.

Looking at the overall experience of the nature and landscape of Zuid-Kennemerland, it can be concluded that the scenic beauty of the area is strongly contributing to a positive experience. The elements the Kaplans (1998) suggest visitors prefer in an area are also reflected in the natural setting of Zuid-Kennemerland. Less positive aspects of the national park, however, can be found in the information provision, crowding and signing. Especially the experiences of first-time visitors were negatively influenced, as the information provision did not meet their needs. They also missed out on information about the area, as they were too busy trying to find their route.

## The recreational experience

Above, there was discussed *who* the visitors of Zuid-Kennemerland are, *why* they are visiting the area and *how* they experience their activity and the nature and landscape. This section will now continue with the *what*; what is essential of this place and the activity that is practiced, that forms the experience of the visitors (see figure 4.1)? Overall it can be said that people have a 'good' experience in Zuid-Kennemerland. This is also confirmed by the emotions people have. As Hull (1991), states, emotions can occur as a consequence of particular experiences. Even though respondents were not very explicit about their mood or emotions, the general impression was that a lot of people seemed to be in a good mood, elate, happy. Only one person appeared distracted. Later on in the conversation it became apparent that this person had a dying family member and was just taking a walk to get away from all the misery. In spite of the fact that people had moments of irritations for example due to the lack of information, crowding, or because the area did not satisfy the function they were looking for, their mood seemed not to be significantly influenced by any of these unfortunate circumstances. All other dimensions of the experience were positively triggered so the visitors had a positive mood. For example: "Nature has an unstringing effect on me, this makes me pleased and happy." (woman, 41); "For me, some parts of the forest provide a magical experience." (man, 48) "I am always going home with a satisfied feeling because this area gives you a feeling of freedom." (man, 60).

It was noticed that some visitors had a more satisfying experience, even leading to flow, than others. To enhance the visitor experience in this area, it is relevant to look deeper into the factors that created very satisfying experiences. Factors that transform people. In all interviews and surveys, the scenic beauty was a major contributor to a good experience. The experience of first-time visitors, however, was influenced negatively because the information did not satisfy their needs. Repeat visitors already knew the area by heart and did not experience this frustration. It also depended on the activity. The runners were in general very happy with the area as it fulfilled the function they were looking for in a landscape. People who went out for a walk, went cycling or horseback riding, always had some points of improvement to mention. Respondents were also asked what Natuurmonumenten could do to improve their experience even more. Interesting was that only one of the visitors suggested that there had to be fewer visitors at the same moment in time and separate paths. All the other informants gave suggestions on facilities. To give some examples: "A treasure hunt for the children in such a beautiful area, where they at the same time learn something about nature, would really contribute." (woman, 47); "I would like to see more signs with information about the landscape and history." (woman, 46); "We had to climb over the tree trunks, as they were hanging over the path. This was a great experience. They should make this a special children path or something. Because we also saw some older people who did not really like it." (man, 36). To name another example of an 48-year-old women:

"A great improvement would be to have a path for the horses that goes to the beach. Now we have to cross the parking lot, which creates dangerous situations with screaming children and irritation because you often have to step off. And there are only a very big and a small route available. A path just in between would be very pleasurable."

Different knowledge levels about the area were noted. Most respondents had very little knowledge about the stories of the ecology and history of the area. Knowledge of the history of a place, however, does something with people, as Randall & Kathy (1998), Sandlos (1998) and Wirth & Gamon (1999) suggest. Only one couple printed out the route description of Natuurmonumenten and actively read the descriptions of each of the highlights. She indicated:



“I personally really enjoy it to read the background and history of the area, it makes the area extra special and you look at it with different eyes. They should put information signs at every highlight for spontaneous visitors, or people who forgot to print the area information.” – woman, 46 –

Especially the pedestrians indicated that they did not know anything about the area. Personal memories also showed to have an influence on the individual experience. Some respondents pointed out places in the area that were memorable to them because they knew the story behind that place or had a personal connection with the place. For example, a 41-year-old woman stated she likes the estate of Duin & Kruidberg because she got married there. Or a 48-year-old man said he enjoys the ruin of Brederode, because he knows the story behind it. The stories and personal memories of the place were for them a reason to regularly visit Zuid-Kennemerland.

### **Segmentation of the visitors**

In the conceptual framework, the BSR-model of segmentation based on lifestyle was proposed. In the area description of Zuid-Kennemerland, it was discussed that the people who lived around the national park were largely part of the modest aqua lifestyle group. Based on the experiences as described above, it is now possible to see whether there is also a relatively higher percentage of the modest aqua group amongst the respondent-visitors of Zuid-Kennemerland. It was said that the visitors of the national park consisted of a very diverse public with amongst others families, elderly couples, and athletes. Their demographics, motives, activities, experiences and needs were compared with each other, and there were two segments that predominantly appeared in this area. The first one is exuberantly yellow, because of the presence of families and friends who next to walking, also go running or mountain biking together. They are mainly the ones that come to relax in nature and to catch up. The other segment that was strongly represented was indeed the modest aqua segment, which is representative for the inhabitants of the province. Their friendliness and helpfulness characterise them. These kinds of people enjoy less active activities that still keep them fit. Their favourite activities are walking and biking, which were largely practiced in the national park. They enjoy spending time on their own hobbies, such as the photographers and the bird watchers that were seen in the park.

The exuberantly yellow lifestyle group also values that everyone enjoys the recreational activity. This may explain why they were annoyed by the fact that there was a lack of information about the routes. In this way, it was hard to see what could be expected during a route, which makes it hard to pick one that everyone likes. Next to wanting to enjoy life, exuberantly yellow also appreciates luxury and convenience, so a well organised event from the beginning to the end is what they prefer (Thijs & van de Laar, 2013). The unclear entrance is therefore something that respondents of the exuberantly yellow lifestyle group finds very frustrating.

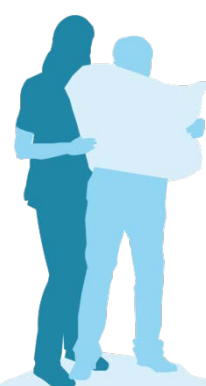
Overall it can be said that the area has a reasonable degree of fit with these two segments as it partly offers what they are looking for when recreating in the national park. But the wishes and needs of these segments need to be responded to more closely in order to create a better experience for both of them. To illustrate, the modest aqua group attaches value to many biking and walking possibilities, as well places that are easily reachable by public transport and small-scale facilities. In these aspects, the area meets their requirements. The modest aquas however also prefer to be able to learn more about an area, the area must tell its own story of the history and ecology. The area must also radiate the local, it must be authentic (Thijs & van de Laar, 2013). Even though the visitor centre provides a lot of information, people who only take the entrance of Duin- and Kruidberg will not be satisfied with this. Modest aqua people also value sustainability, which is not clearly stressed in the area around that entrance. The needs of the exuberantly yellow group are met in terms of the ability for sportive activities in the area, the variation in the landscape and the liveliness of the area. Much improvement,

however, can be found in providing information on the routes and signing. Furthermore, this group finds it important to be challenged and entertained; their senses need to be triggered. At this moment, the park only provides ready-made routes without a high entertainment value or challenges that motivate the visitors to take their own initiatives. There was also minority of visitors that were not part of the most dominant segments, nor could be easily placed in the other segments of the model.

### **Conclusion Zuid-Kennemerland**

It can be concluded that the visitors of Zuid-Kennemerland have numerous motives for recreating in nature. There are also different motives for people that practice the same activity. This is especially the case with walking. Runners often appear to have a common goal, which is physical exercise. Runners are the most satisfied visitors as they experienced 'flow-states'. Each activity brings its own experience. However, it clearly appeared that an experience also depends on what a person is looking for in an area and the natural setting itself. A classification based on lifestyle, that includes all these concepts (motivations, activity, interests, needs) divides most of the visitors in two lifestyle segments. The exuberantly yellow and modest aqua segments are the two segments that are most well represented in Zuid-Kennemerland. Even though the national park provides the scenic beauty the segments are looking for, still a lot can be improved in order to enhance their recreational experience in nature. In particular, the recreational facilities, information provision, and user paths should be improved.

After having discussed Zuid-Kennemerland, the following section will present the case study of Planken Wambuis.



## 4.2 Planken Wambuis



As presented in the introduction of this chapter, each case study will be presented according to the structure of figure 4.1. First the site characteristics of Planken Wambuis will be explained.



Planken Wambuis is located in the Dutch province Gelderland nearby de Hoge Veluwe and Otterloo (see figure 4.11). Approximately two-third of Planken Wambuis is covered with pine tree forest. Moorland mainly covers the other part of the area. The high-density level of the area forms a pleasurable living area for different kinds of toads and even the Viper (Natuurmonumenten, 2014c). Other animals present in the area are the red deer, wild boar, badger, fox, sand lizard, and the stonechat. New Forest ponies, Spanish cattle and sheep help against the encroachment and tree growth on the moorlands (Klankbordgroep Planken Wambuis & Districtscommissie Gelderland, 2007).

### A quick overview of Planken Wambuis

- 2284 hectares northwest of Arnhem.
- Everyone is free to walk and bike on the roads and paths, except for the animal rest areas.
- No visitor centre present. But the VVV of Zuid-West Veluwe is nearby.
- Walking and biking routes present, most of them suitable for wheelchair users.
- There are several parking spots at each of the entrances.
- Horse riding is allowed in the area.
- Dogs must be leashed in the whole area.
- There are three observation points.
- One teahouse and one restaurant can be found in the area.




Figure 4.11 Overview Planken Wambuis

### Natuurmonumenten

Planken Wambuis has been in the hands of Natuurmonumenten since 1960 (Klankbordgroep Planken Wambuis & Districtscommissie Gelderland, 2007). In the past, this natural area was surrounded by farming companies, highways, and other obstacles. In the past years, Natuurmonumenten became very active and changed this by purchasing part of the farming lands. The agricultural enclaves of Reijerscamp and Oud Reemst were added to Planken Wambuis and redesigned in a nature-friendly way. Passages over the highways have been made so that animals can travel between the different parts of the natural area (Natuurmonumenten, 2014h).

### Facilities

Three observation points can be found along the walking and biking routes. Figure 4.12 shows an image of one of the observation points. The observation points provide an overview over the open moorlands in the area, offering a big chance to spot Spanish cows and other animals. When people want to stay longer in the area, there is a holiday farm where groups of more than six people can stay in the middle of nature. Visitors can also stay at the nearby camping. Close to the camping, Natuurmonumenten built a trekking cabin with wood out of Planken Wambuis. This cabin is available for short as well as long stays (Ardoer campings, 2015). There are 19 kilometres of walking routes and



17 kilometres for cycling. The marked walking trail stresses the natural highlights of Planken Wambuis (figure 4.13). Recently, another trail was plotted to visualize the cultural-historical elements of the area. Fragments of the biking paths are part of a poetical biking route that runs through the West Veluwe. The route brings people to 38 places in the area that were meaningful and precious for the locals. Horse(wo)men can also spend a considerable amount of time in Planken Wambuis considering the 19 kilometres of equestrian trails. Along the routes, different benches were spotted. People can enjoy a drink and a snack in the middle of the park at teahouse 'de Mossel'. Even though this tea house is only opened from April until September every year, it is a very popular destination for the recreationists of Planken Wambuis. Even the horse(wo)men can temporarily stable their horses to enjoy a refreshment during their tour (Theeschenkerij Mossel, 2013). The foresters at Planken Wambuis regularly offer different excursions, such as the winter safari. Some excursions are specifically meant for children. One excursion, for example, offers children the chance to imitate animals that live in the area. Another excursion teaches children how to make bat boxes while they learn about bats at the same time. A participation- as well as a material fee, is asked (Natuurmonumenten, 2015a).



Figure 4.12 Observation point  
(Natuurmonumenten; Geurt Besselink)



Figure 4.13 Part of the signed hiking trail

### Recreation policy

Unique elements of Planken Wambuis are the peace and serenity the area offers (Klankbordgroep Planken Wambuis & Districtscommissie Gelderland, 2007). Most of the recreationists in this area undertake the activities of walking, biking and horseback riding. Other unique elements of the area are the openness of the moorlands and the variety between moorland, forest, and open spots. The Putheide, the drift sand, the Kruiponder-bergen, the former agricultural fields, the Oude Hout, the hornbeam and the viewpoints of Oud-Reerst, Nieuw-Reerst and Valenberg are memorable places in the area (Klankbordgroep Planken Wambuis & Districtscommissie Gelderland, 2007).

For the future, it is not desirable to organise activities in the area that can disturb the visitors that come for peace and serenity. Therefore, there will not be any additional advertising of the area. Facilities such as the teahouse 'de Mossel' with accessible toilets and a water tap will only be preserved, not expanded. It is not part of the policy to attract a broader public, but to keep the number of recreationists low in order to preserve the rest and serenity. Besides, there is no plan for expanding the infrastructure for pedestrians and bikers. The provided information must be kept 'low-profile' to accommodate the serene character of the area. Therefore, no information panels are present in the area, and the information present at the entrance is reduced to a minimum. The area must stay distinctive compared to the surrounding areas. The area is freely accessible, also free parking spaces are available (Natuurmonumenten, 2014e; 2014f).

### Cultural heritage

The area also has a rich cultural history. An old well, a couple of agricultural buildings, the shifting sands of 'de Mossel', and an ancient grain field in Oud-Reerst, are the main cultural elements in Planken Wambuis. Furthermore, there are many (less visible) elements in the area that remind of the Second World War. For example, a small railway runs through a big part of Planken Wambuis. The

train was used to transport ammunition and equipment for the German army. The ambition is to make the cultural-historical elements as visible as possible without loss of the biodiversity of the area (Klankbordgroep Planken Wambuis & Districtscommissie Gelderland, 2007).

### Nature policy

The nature in Planken Wambuis must be kept untouched, as natural as possible. Interventions are only necessary to maintain and strengthen the biodiversity, openness, and variation in the landscape. In the course of time, the policy is to enlarge the migration possibilities for animals in order to increase the survival of many animal species. Also, there is a wish for expanding the area by investing in Zuid-Ginkel and Eder heide (Klankbordgroep Planken Wambuis & Districtscommissie Gelderland, 2007).

### Lifestyle segmentation

The people that live around Planken Wambuis have a considerable share in the green segment (see figure 4.14). This area has been chosen as research area because it is seen as 'a fifth wheel'. Namely, it is part of the bigger nature area 'de Veluwe', which houses beautiful and unique nature (Stichting het nationale park de hoge veluwe, 2015). De Veluwe is also part of a National Park that is well known by people, while Planken Wambuis is not. Natuurmonumenten, therefore, wanted to know why people visit Planken Wambuis, why they choose for Planken Wambuis and not for other areas in de Veluwe. The percentages of the modest aqua and quiet green segments living around Planken Wambuis do not deviate much from the percentages in the Netherlands and the province: the quiet green segment has a share of 15 percent around Planken compared to 16 percent in the province. For the modest aqua segment, this is 16 percent compared to 15 percent in the province (SmartAgent, 2012b).



Figure 4.14 Lifestyles surrounding Planken Wambuis (SmartAgent, 2012)

### Visitor profile

The visitors in Planken Wambuis were very helpful, friendly, and interested in this research. Because of their willingness to talk, only four pedestrians and two mountain bikers were interviewed. There was no time left to let other visitors fill out surveys. Four of the six visitors came from nearby villages such as Renkum and Renswoude. They saw Planken Wambuis as their 'backyard'. The other two respondents came from Utrecht and Winterswijk. Also in this case visitors who lived nearby visited the area frequently, on average once every two weeks. The visitors that came from further away both visited the area for the first time. All the interviewees brought another adult along with them. It was also observed that there were mainly pedestrians that visited the park as a couple. Families with young children were observed too, but they were small in number. The mountain bikers were more often cycling in bigger groups ranging from four to ten mountain bikers in one group. The average age of the interviewees was 59.4. Using the demographics of the province Gelderland it was possible to look specifically at the statistics of the areas nearby Planken Wambuis, which were in this case Renkum, Ede and Arnhem. On average, the ages that appear most commonly in these areas are the ages from 45 to 64 (Provincie Gelderland Statistisch zakboek, 2014a). Taking the average of these ages is 54.5, which lies close to the average of the visitors of Planken Wambuis. Concerning gender, three women, as well as three men, were interviewed. This gender balance is also evident with the surrounding areas (Provincie Gelderland Statistisch zakboek, 2014b). During the observations, it was noted that there were no 'foreigner looking' individuals visiting the area. Interesting is that the

statistics of the surrounding areas have a relative high percentage of foreign inhabitants compared to other places in the province. According to Buijs (2009), this is not extraordinary as he states that outdoor recreation in the Netherlands is, in general, a 'white' affair. Overall, the data collected from the interviews are not very generalizable as there are only six respondents. Qualitative research, however, does not depend on the quantity, but rather looks at the cases that are interesting for the qualitative research (Boeije, 2010). Still, concerning age and gender the interviewed visitor represent the surrounding inhabitants well. Concerning nationality this is not the case, as the non-Dutch nationality is poorly represented among visitors of Planken Wambuis.

### Visitor motivations

Several motivations came forward when visitors were asked what their initial reason was for visiting a natural area. Two of the respondents who were walking in the area did that to stay fit and at the same time enjoy nature:

"My husband and I try to walk one hour every day next to our work. And we preferably do that in nature, we enjoy nature so much. In the weekends, we always walk longer distances, to get to see more of the nature. We walk every day for our health." – woman, 61 –

This couple explained that a healthy lifestyle became more and more important for them, and they nowadays try to pay more attention to their health. It shows how people's lifestyle can change with the consequence for this couple that they are to be found more in natural areas. Furthermore, in the above quote, the role of enjoying nature seems as important as the motivation for physical exercise. One of the mountain bikers implied that staying fit is an important motivation, but to enjoy nature is important as well: "I am here to enjoy nature and also to enjoy my sport. I value the peace and serenity in this speedy world. Nature has such a positive influence on my wellbeing, I experience that when I am outside in nature." (woman, 53).

Another couple had the motivation to catch up and at the same time enjoy nature: "I wanted to catch up with a friend of mine and we decided to do that by having a nice walk in nature." (woman, 39). Other visitors were motivated to come because they read the book about the area (Abels, 2014). The book made them enthusiastic about all the things that can be seen in the area. They wanted to see for themselves that what the book said was true. "After I recently read the book about Planken Wambuis I wanted to see it with my own eyes. Next to that we were looking for a place where we could have a nice long walk in nature." (man, 61). The type of motivation of this couple can be characterised as a typical pull factor (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). The attributes of the destination of which the man read about, motivated him to visit the area and enjoy the imagery of the landscape. Referring to the literature, often occurring motivations for recreation are, in conformity with the above, catching up and physical exercise (Bieger & Leasser, 2002; Guinn, 1980; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Push factors cause these motivations. Other motivations that were named in literature, such as escapism and learning about nature, did not appear from interviews in Planken Wambuis.

### Motivations for visiting Planken Wambuis

There are several reasons for visitors to specifically come to Planken Wambuis. Two of the six interviewees said that their reason for visiting the area was because it was nearby. To give an example: "A lovely area, nearby home. Always something to see and not too busy." (man, 70). Visitors pay a lot of attention to travel distance as they appreciate a beautiful natural area that is located nearby their home. The other two visitors that came from further away chose Planken Wambuis because: "We are coming from different areas and this nature area was sort of located in the middle so that we had the same traveling time" (woman, 39). In this case, the location plays a role too. Another couple was looking for a quiet place to walk in nature. Friends of them recommended this

area so that they were able to avoid the crowds that visited the nature nearby home. They expected Planken Wambuis to be a quiet natural area, where they could walk undisturbed. Next to the location, the frequent visitors also chose Planken Wambuis because of its trees. They give protection from the cold winter winds and provide shadow on hot summer days. In the other surrounding natural areas, there are more open spaces, which makes it sometimes inclement in these natural areas. In short, the visitors are attracted by Planken Wambuis among others because of the peace and serenity, and also the presence of trees.

### **Comparing motivations with the visitor profile**

There are no direct links to the demographics of the visitors and the motivations of the visitors. The motives of the people who came from further away were different from the most repeat visitors.

### **The experience of activities**

Observations showed that there were several pedestrians and mountain bikers present in the area. Horse rides were noted multiple times too, often in groups of two or three. Remarkably, there was an absence of runners. During the research period, not one of them was observed. As Buijs, et al. (2006) argue, individuals doing the same activity may have a total different experience. Both the observations and the interviews showed this clearly with regard to the pedestrians. There is a distinction between those who want to catch up and those who visit with the motive for physical exercise and to enjoy nature. Their focus of attention (Knopf, 1987) lies much more on nature while the ones that want to catch up rather have their focus on the other. Nature contributes to their experience but is rather in the background. These quotes show how one activity can entail different experiences: "During the walk it made me happy to hear that my friend was doing fine. And to discuss serious matters in nature, where no one judges you, and you can speak out what you want to say. Just great." (woman, 39); "We saw raptors flying, which took our attention during the walk. Also the beautiful air, the wind, the birds, it was all great to experience." (woman, 61). The mountain bikers had their focus more on their activity. The nature, as they said, 'gives us visual enjoyment, we focus on it at a larger scale'. They do not look at the diversity of plants or animals, but rather the landscape as a whole.

Buijs, et al. (2006) suggest that what people experience during their activity depends on the different functions individuals look for in an area. The mountain bikers in Planken Wambuis look for an area with a path that allows them to mountain bike there. According to the interviewees, a hilly area with mud here and there makes them satisfied. The area does not need to become more challenging than it already is. However, from the statements of the interviewees it appeared that they did not have a 'flow' experience (Hayllar, 2003). Withal, the mountain bikers require that the area must not become too artificial, and they want more choice in paths they can use. They would also like to see the biking path Otterlo-Mossel to be improved because the quality of the path is low. They search for a wider opportunity to go anywhere while Planken Wambuis only offers them a small number of directions to go. On the other hand, the pedestrians require fewer mountain bikers in the area. Even though they are 'less skilled' visitors, they experience more events of crowding. This contradicts with Manning's (2010) argument that highly specialised visitors experience higher levels of crowding. The pedestrians appreciate the peace and serenity of the area, which is, in their perception, disturbed by the mountain bikers. The mountain bikers sometimes create unsafe situations and at the same time they are loud. From the observations it can also be concluded that the bikes, as well as the voices of the mountain bikers, can be heard from quite a distance. Nevertheless, pedestrians announced that they are still very attracted by the landscape because in general, the area does give the impression of rest and peace. Furthermore, there were some notes from the pedestrians about the practicability of the paths:

“For me it is important that it is quiet in the area and serene. The paths must also be kind of accessible. I mean they do not need to be super flat, but also not a swimming pool, like they currently are. I also find it important that the area is beautiful”. – woman, 56 –

The paths that just looked like a swimming pool prevented them from performing their activity in a way they could immerse in nature. As Hayllar (2003) would argue, the challenge is too big. It is not possible to complete their goal the way they want to, which stops them from coming into a flow. The mountain bikers seem to come closer to an experience of flow. However, also for them there are points of improvement of which they are aware of during their activity.

### Comparing the activities with the visitor profile

Referring to the motivations in combination with the activities, it seems that there is a division between more place-oriented visitors and more use-oriented visitors in Planken Wambuis. Two-thirds of the pedestrians indicated that they were visiting Planken Wambuis to enjoy nature and the history of the area. While the mountain bikers came specifically for the activity and went to Planken Wambuis as it was their back yard. The place-oriented visitors also talked more about the nature and conservation of the area, while the activity-oriented visitors rather talked about their equipment, challenging routes and being together. This would confirm the suggestion of Hinds and Sparks (2008) that there are differences in attitudes towards the natural environment by specialization. Mountain bikers are more specialised visitors than the pedestrians and most of them were also very frequent visitors. They are, however, not the ones that indicated to value conservation of the natural area. The theory, however, suggests that frequent visits cause more actions in pro-environmental behaviour. Rather the pedestrians more often had explicit opinions about issues such as nature conservation. One of the pedestrians was even involved with a ‘wadden<sup>4</sup> project’. Furthermore, it was noticed that mountain biking was mainly carried out by people between the 30 and 45 while hiking was done by people ranging from 35 to 71. There was no difference perceived between activities and gender.

### The experience of nature & landscape

In the previous section about visitor motivations, it was said that people value Planken Wambuis because the area offers them visual diversity. Figure 4.15 shows the different landscapes of the area. There are spaces with many trees, or lanes with different kinds of trees, as well as open moorlands, and sand dunes. The visitors very much appreciate this above what the other surrounding natural areas have to offer: “The trees are beautiful, and the views are varied and over and over again stunning. That is something that really makes this area unique.” (woman, 61).



Figure 4.15 Biodiversity in Planken Wambuis

---

<sup>4</sup> Wadden is short for wadden islands; several islands on the top of the Netherlands.



Next to the variation in landscape, people also value Planken Wambuis for its wildlife. Visitors especially visit this area with the hope to see some wildlife. They said to be disappointed when they did not see the animals they were looking for. One couple always comes to look for the group of horses that wander around in the area (figure 4.16). As several interviewees indicated, the number of times visitors see the wildlife is decreasing. The visitors really find that a pity as they find the wildlife one of the unique elements of Planken Wambuis, something that they primarily attracts them to visit the area.



*Figure 4.16 Horses in Planken Wambuis*

Concerning the coherence (preference matrix of Kaplan et al. (1998), Planken Wambuis has some recognisable and repeating themes. The three lanes, open moorlands and forests make it easier to understand the place. Respondents did not experience problems with way finding, but this might be caused by the fact that the majority of them are repeat visitors and know the area by heart. Planken Wambuis offers high, as well as low, complexity views. The open moorlands are low in complexity, as they do not have much variety in the landscape. Other parts, however, such as shown in figure 4.17 are very complex offering a great richness and variety in visual elements.



*Figure 4.17 Complex landscape in Planken Wambuis*

The first-time visitors mentioned that they did not have many difficulties in navigating through the area. They sometimes found it hard to orientate at what point in the area they were exactly situated during their walk. To increase the legibility, the Kaplans (1985) suggest the introduction of memorable components to help with orientation. In the interviews, it did not come forward that there were recognisable landmarks in the area. Of course, there is the recognisable lane of trees, but because there are more of those lanes, it loses its distinctiveness, which makes the way finding still not straightforward.



*Figure 4.18 Badly maintained paths in Planken Wambuis*

The fourth element of the preference matrix is mystery, the desire to explore a place. It looks like the visitors are quite satisfied with this point; they indicated to look for paths that are quieter. They are interested in the paths that are away of the main paths and are triggered enough to go and explore.

## Facilities

According to Kaplan (1985), the available facilities in a natural area have an impact on the recreational experience too. In Planken Wambuis, the facilitation of the paths had an adverse influence on the experience of the visitors. First, the limited availability of mountain bike paths (according to the mountain bikers) keeps them from the feeling of freedom. They cannot go wherever they want to go. The pedestrians mainly have their comments on the quality of the paths. They indicated that many of the paths were impassable due to the enormous holes in the trails that were filled up with water (figure 4.18). During the observations, I saw that people had difficulties with passing these paths. Especially the elderly seem less flexible to go off road.

## Information and signing

Next to the fact that people were not informed about the quality of the paths, and possible detours to take, they also did not understand why certain trees were felled and other not:

“We are visiting this area regularly but in our opinion the area is often turned into chaos because of the tree-cutting. According to the website there are all kinds of animals in the area, but it is very hard to see or even hear them. And we are visiting the area often at different times.” - man, 70 -

Visitors said this caused confusion and frustration among them. They would like to know why it is necessary to use the huge machines for maintenance works, and they want to understand why this is done.

Two problems were experienced with the signed Natuurmonumenten routes. Firstly, the most popular route of Planken Wambuis (the yellow route) did not have consistent signing in the Natuurmonumenten style. To clarify, figure 4.19 shows the signing that was used for Planken Wambuis, while in most other Natuurmonumenten properties signing such as figure 4.20 are used. Extra confusing was that a signed Natuurmonumenten route on the other side of the road of Planken Wambuis (the red route) did have the mainstream Natuurmonumenten signing. In this way, the association is less recognisable and causes confusion and uncertainty amongst the visitors. The second problem was that the spots on the rocks were not always clear enough to indicate the right direction. Here again, visitors said to be confused sometimes because they did not know which direction to go exactly. Both first-time, as well as repeat visitors, argued that routes should be made



Figure 4.19 Route signing on rock



Figure 4.20 Route signing on pole

clearer. It was greatly appreciated that people could take a brochure with the walking route with them at the main entrance. This helped them with navigating through the area in case the signing on the rocks was less clear.

## The recreational experience

By combining the visitor's personal motivations, the experience of the activity, and the experience of nature and landscape, this section tries to create an image of the recreational experience in Planken Wambuis. It looks like most visitors begin their visit without negative influences; the area is accessible and starts with clear signing at the entrance. According to Bell (2008) Planken Wambuis shows a great example of how a trail should start. One of the popular entrances of the area, near to the Natuurmonumenten centre (figure 4.21) and the Planken Wambuis restaurant, starts with the

popular yellow-signed route. Visitors are first lead through a forest that slowly emerges from the dark canopy into an open sunny area. Bell argues that this provides moments of relief and pleasant surprise. There are several places where visitors can experience such situations in Planken Wambuis. According to the visitors, the presence of forest plays an important role in Planken Wambuis. It is something that other surrounding areas have less and allows people to experience such moments of relief and pleasant surprise.



*Figure 4.21 NM centre Planken Wambuis*

Next to the visual elements of Planken Wambuis discussed in the previous section, Medway (20105) argued that the 'non-seeing' senses also have an important role in experiencing nature. In Planken Wambuis the triggers of scent, touch and taste were barely mentioned by the respondents. Hearing was multiple times indicated because of negative triggers. Namely, the highway that lies almost parallel with the area. This clearly influences the extent to which people feel close to nature. "Something negative is that you can hear the highway quite well through the park. This keeps you away from the sounds of nature, and you always keep the feeling that you are close to civilization." (woman, 61). This shows that the sense of hearing did have a negative influence on the experiences of the visitors. The positive element of this is that the visitors acknowledge that they know it is quite hard to change this situation and accept it. For example:

"The views of the area were stunning, but the traffic noise of the A12 and the N224 continued to be disturbing. But I am afraid that is probably hard to adapt, especially with the south wind. This is a minor setback because in 'real' nature you need to hear the wind and the birds." – man, 71 –

Mountain bikers are focused on the activity and have no need for more (cultural-historical) information in and around the park. In general people are interested in this, but the mountain bikers are not looking for it during their visit. They rather want to have the possibility to look it up on the NM website or read the book on a moment that suits them. Pedestrians specifically visit the area for the quiet environment; they want to move away from civilisation. A 70-year-old man who was walking in the area with his wife even indicated that they are always looking for the spots where there is no information provided to be able to get immersed in nature. This is a clear example of what Goossen and de Boer (2008) suggest. They point out that different user groups have different needs for information and so react differently to certain stories. People with personal memories in Planken Wambuis appeared to know a lot about the area and seemed to have a more explicit opinion about the management and maintenance of Planken Wambuis. De Vries (2009) explains that this is caused by the emotional attachment to a place because of the personal memories. The visitors that had personal memories seemed to be more open to enjoy their surrounding:

"For us it is an area where we go to if we have a little more time. The good memories are there from the time that we together with our young children visited the area, but especially the memories of being together in nature." – woman, 61 –

They are reminded of the (positive) memories every time they visit Planken Wambuis and also seem to enjoy that. In some cases, memories of challenging moments turned into a great story for people to pass on to their friends. The experience turns out to become a pleasurable memory, such as this mountain biker explained:

“We got stuck with our car once when people were still permitted to visit the area by car. In general this is not a big problem, but there were no people around, and I was pregnant expecting the baby any minute. At that moment, it was a stressful situation, but everything ended well, and it is a great story. Every time I visit Planken Wambuis I think of it, and it makes me smile.” – woman, 53 –

### **Segmentation of the visitors**

In the section about the site characteristics of Planken Wambuis, it was described that the quiet green and the modest aqua lifestyle groups have a considerable share of inhabitants around Planken Wambuis. The quiet green lifestyle group was clearly present in Planken Wambuis at the time of the research because most visitors wanted to relax, get away from the daily grind and were looking for rest nearby their home. Characteristic for this group is that these people are relatively serious. This showed in the dedication with which they talked about Planken Wambuis. The majority of the visitors is older than fifty years, which corresponds more or less with the quiet green segment of which 40 percent is 55 years or older. This group mainly includes the pedestrians, but also some of the mountain bikers. When comparing the needs of the quiet green group with what Planken Wambuis has to offer it can be said that Planken Wambuis is on the right track but is not entirely there yet. In their policy it is stated that it is the goal to create an area that is unique for its quiet atmosphere. The sounds of the mountain bikers and the highway, however, should be reduced to experience more peace and serenity. Furthermore, the way finding must become clearer. As suggested by the visitors, the wildlife must become more visible again as well. The modest aqua lifestyle group can also be identified among the visitors of Planken Wambuis, but less dominant than the quiet green segment. They are mainly recognised for their helpfulness and their mildness. They want to stay fit but are also interested in learning about culture and history. For them, the Planken Wambuis book is a perfect solution to meet their needs concerning the provision of information about the culture and history of the place. They would, however, also value the area to be more serene.

### **Conclusion Planken Wambuis**

Overall, the experience of the visitor in Planken Wambuis starts positive in the beginning. The presence of wildlife and the biodiversity within the natural area contributes to a satisfying nature experience. After entering Planken Wambuis, slowly elements come forward that have a slight negative impact on the recreational experience. Even though it was concluded that the scores of the preference matrix are good, the area still lacks certain facilities. The mountain bikers would like to see more paths. They are looking for a challenging environment to do that. Also, to get the ultimate feeling of freedom, they would like to see more paths. The pedestrians of Planken Wambuis are looking for more peace and serenity allowing them to immerse in nature even more. They are bothered by the ‘unnatural’ sound of the highway and the presence of the mountain bikers that keeps them from coming into a flow. The visitors that go to Planken Wambuis with the motive to catch up are less bothered by these issues. They attach more value to easy way finding. According to the Kaplans (1998) their experience could be enhanced by implementing more orientation points in the landscape.

## 4.3 Heumensoord







This section will provide an overview of the outcomes of the case study about Heumensoord. Further down will be explained that Natuurmonumenten got the ownership over the area very recently, in 2013. For that reason, there are no organisational reports about this area available yet. The information described in this section is therefore mainly based on the information from the website and from own observations.



Heumensoord is located close to the city of Nijmegen, in the province of Gelderland (see figure 4.22), covering 500 hectares of ground. The area mainly consists of forest, but also covers a considerable amount of moorland and grassland. Bird lovers have to come to this area since the Yellowhammer, the Nightjar, and the Long-eared Owl can be encountered. Heumensoord houses more than 50 types of mushrooms. A herd of sheep grazes parts of Heumensoord. The sheep take care of the conservation of the moorland and create a natural transitional area from the moorland to the surrounding forest.

### A quick overview of Heumensoord

- Covers around 500 hectares
- Everyone is free to walk on the roads and paths
- Parking lot Beukenlaan, Malden
- A bus passes the entrance of the nature area
- Walking and biking routes, as well as horse riding tracks present
- There is an ATB-route
- The biggest part of Heumensoord allows dogs to walk freely
- No visitor centre present but a nearby tourist office in Nijmegen
- Presence of spectacular lookouts, bird watching cabins and picnic tables




Figure 4.22 Overview Heumensoord

In the past, Heumensoord used to be a military training ground. Different elements reflect back to this time such as old fire walls and a memorial cross on top of a hill. When Heumensoord became owned by the province, it became a production forest. The clear and straight structure still reminds of these days.

### Natuurmonumenten

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of April 2013, the Municipality of Nijmegen allowed Natuurmonumenten to manage Heumensoord as a leaseholder. It was arranged that no drastic measures would be undertaken that would change the structure of the area when the ownership was converted. Other tenants and users such as foundation Zweefvliegveld Maldens Vlak, Foundation Vierdaagse and the Minister of Defence kept their user rights (Natuurmonumenten, 2013). Nowadays, everyone is still able to walk, bike and ride in Heumensoord. The reason for Natuurmonumenten to invest in this area was that the municipality of Nijmegen did not consider the management of the nature area as one of the municipal



core tasks. This is a good example of the problem described in the introduction (chapter one), that municipalities take less responsibility for nature.

### Facilities

There is plenty to do for recreationists in Heumensoord. There are paths for pedestrians, bikers, all-terrain bikers and horse(wo)men. Furthermore, there are places where people can have a picnic, and walk their dog without leashing them. Next to that there is an air-field for gliders. Near to this field, there is a catering that is open for everyone to enjoy a drink and a snack and at the same time watch the gliders. Pedestrians can follow three different marked trails. The red route starts at the upper part of the area and the yellow route follows a track around the gliding field. The third route is a short route leaving from Malden, a nearby village. Runners can train in rounds of three kilometres to test their skills with the so-called 'coopertest'. With this test, runners have exactly 12 minutes to run as many rounds as they can. On the Internet it is possible to connect your outcomes with gender and age to see how much you scored. Every year the 'Mariekenloop' is organised. This is a run especially for women where they can run either five or ten kilometres (Natuurmonumenten, 2014f). Other facilities observed were several benches along the routes and a water tap nearby the glid field. Currently, there are no excursions offered in Heumensoord.

### Cultural history

The area hosts several cultural elements. Firstly there is a little avenue with on both sides Beech trees. These monumental trees are already more than 150 years old. For the future, the management aims to maintain this avenue. In case one of the trees disappears because of an illness or during a storm, it will be replaced. There is an archaeological monument existing of the remains of a Roman sentinel too. This sentinel was part of a chain of sentinels on the border of the Roman Empire. The sentinel in Heumensoord was built of wood and approximately 20 by 20 meters big, and 8 meters high, covered by tiles. Nowadays the terrain where the sentinel was located is fully covered with netting and sand, to protect it from treasure hunters. The former canals are however made visible in the landscape.



Figure 4.23 Roman sentinel Heumensoord

### Segmentation

The relatively high share in the entrepreneurial purple lifestyle group characterises Nijmegen and surroundings. 22 Percent of the inhabitants in Nijmegen and surroundings are part of this group

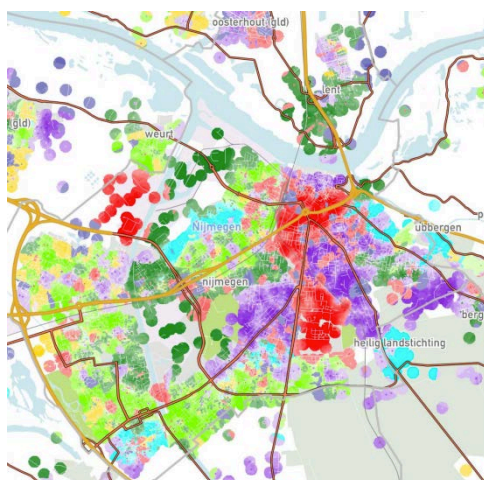


Figure 4.24 Lifestyles Nijmegen (SmartAgent, 2012)

compared to only 9 percent on the national level (The SmartAgent Company, 2011). The city also hosts a noticeable high amount of creative and inspiring red, namely 13 percent compared to six percent on the national level. All the other segments have a smaller share compared to the national level. Especially extraordinary yellow, which represents 18 percent of the Dutch inhabitants, is only for ten percent present in Nijmegen. Smaller areas that surround Heumensoord, such as Heumen, Renkum and Malden, also report significantly higher levels of the entrepreneurial purple lifestyle group (figure 4.24). Renkum also has a large

number of inhabitants that represent the quiet green lifestyle group. Only Groesbeek does not differ much in the entrepreneurial lifestyle group compared to the national level, but scores rather high with the cosy lime group (33 percent compared to 24 percent in the Netherlands) (The SmartAgent Company, 2011).

### Visitor profile

In Heumensoord, a total of 18 people were questioned. Six of these 18 participated in an interview, and the other 12 filled out the survey. Four of the six interviews were conducted via phone, as these respondents were willing to help with the research, but at the moment of approaching them did not have the time for an extensive interview. In general, participants were willing to help but did not want to invest much time in it. Their answers were in general quite short, but clear. The respondents carried out a range of activities including mountain biking, Nordic walking, running and hiking. The average age of the participants was 51 years old. However, it must be noted that younger looking people were often very busy with their activity and hard to approach. For this reason, it is expected that the average age of the visitors lies lower than 51. To see whether the visitors represented the demographics of the inhabitants living around Heumensoord, amongst other the age of the visitors is compared with the statistics of the locals from Nijmegen, Heumen and Groesbeek; all places nearby Heumensoord were studied. The majority of the respondents came from places nearby Heumensoord, such as Nijmegen, Mook and Lingewaard. Only two visitors came from a place that was longer than a thirty-minute drive from Heumensoord. The average age of the people living in the surrounding areas of Heumensoord is 48 (Provincie Gelderland Statistisch zakboek, 2014b). Concerning gender, the percentage of respondents that were women is only 28 percent while in the surrounding areas women represent 52 percent of the population. This is not representative. The observations also confirmed that there were more men than women during the research period. Looking at the frequency of the visits, it can be said that more than half of the respondents visited Heumensoord at least once a week. Only one participant visited Heumensoord for the first time. Visitors were also asked whether they were a member of Natuurmonumenten or not. In the previously discussed cases, there were no striking outcomes that were worth mentioning. In the case of Heumensoord, it is definitely worth spending attention to, as only two of the 18 participants were member of the association.

### Visitor motivations

Respondents were visiting a natural area among others because they wanted to have some fresh air, walk outside and to experience the autumn colours. People who did sports, such as running, not only did that for relaxation, but also to avoid the high costs of a gym or an athletics track:

“A natural area gives you the possibility to sport, and especially for running, you do not need machines. For other sports, you can use elements in nature such as tree trunks and hills to challenge you. Next to that you can go whenever you want.” – man, 47 –

It is interesting to see that commonly named motivations in the academic literature (i.e. Guinn, 1980; Manning & Anderson, 2012), are not predominantly reflected in the motives that are named above by the visitors. Especially the social part of visiting nature has not been mentioned among the visitors of Heumensoord. The reason to go for a learning experience is also missing.

### Motives for visiting Heumensoord

Also in this case study the primary motivation for visiting Heumensoord is the location of the area: “It is around the corner of my house.” (woman, 33); “It is easy to reach from the city centre.” (man, 25); “We always feel rich with such a beautiful green place close to Nijmegen.” (woman, 61). During the course of the interviews it became clear that visitors really appreciate a green place near the city.

Another motivation for people to come to Heumensoord explicitly was that the area provided excellent paths to carry out physical exercises: “It is nearby, and the parcours are not too challenging, just right.” (man, 52); “The couper path is a great way to do training with my son and to test my abilities.” (man, 42). Dog owners indicated to be attracted by Heumensoord because it offers nice places where they can walk their dog unleashed. Besides the fact that it is a place where the dog can walk free safely, they indicated that the forest is also much nicer to walk for their dogs rather than the busy city.

Looking at the push and pull factors from Cutler and Carmichael (2010), overall, the visitors are mainly visiting Heumensoord because of push factors. Many visitors came to recreate in Heumensoord because they wanted to do sport, as an escape from the busy life, or to walk the dog. It was not often the case that people went to Heumensoord because of the destination-specific activities or the imagery of the landscape. The main pull factor was the location of Heumensoord.

### **Motivations and the visitor profile**

The people that were outside to walk their dog were all between 30 and 40 years old. People older than 50 years often had the motive to do physical exercise, mainly with the focus on staying healthy and getting enough physical exercise. Youngsters rather had the motivation to exercise with the goal to train for games, to challenge themselves, or to get a well-shaped body. Respondents from all ages used the nature as an escape from their daily routines.

### **The experience of activities**

During the research period, visitors undertook different kinds of activities. The two activities that were most commonly observed were walking the dog and mountain biking: “My dog and I always have long walks in the forest, we both enjoy that.” (woman, 33); “You cycle a certain route with a bike that is specially made for this. You can cycle alternate routes at different speeds.” (man, 59). Besides that, there were also many pedestrians and runners present in the area. For example, “We just enjoy running, starting with a warming up and depending on how we feel, and what we did before, we do certain exercises. Sometimes short interval exercises and other times longer runs.” (man, 56). Once a while people with Nordic walking sticks were spotted. Even though paths for horses are facilitated in the area, horse(wo)men were never spotted during the observations. It was tried to observe them by walking parallel with the equestrian trails. After closer examination, I also saw that the quality of the path was not very high. One of the interviewees, a 55-year-old who usually runs in the area, confirms this observation:

“With those horse paths they can do nothing. There is a great amount of tree roots, so it is hardly passable for horses. The only thing you can do there is walk with the horse and there are no other passes possible. That is too dangerous. And I do not know if you are familiar with horseback riding, but it is maybe the first time okay to take it slow, but afterwards you want to go faster. Well, galloping is not possible in Heumensbos because the paths are just too dangerous.”

This quote may explain why the activity of horseback riding was not observed. Even though there was a lack of horseback riders, there were enough other visitors in Heumensoord. Numerous respondents shared their frustration concerning the crowds. One of the pedestrians who was walking his dog even indicated that he found Heumensoord one big ‘Efteling’ (Dutch attraction park) in the weekends. A 47-year-old man explains: “Heumensoord is very enjoyable, a good place to relax. But on the weekends it becomes busier and busier. This impairs the peace and serenity of the surroundings.” This 52-year-old man confirms crowding issues too:



“There are times that we have trouble with people that have no control over their dog. As a runner, you have to point out to them that they need to keep their dogs with them. Cause otherwise a too enthusiastic dog will run after you and bite you in the ankles. I understand that a dog finds that fantastic. In his enthusiasm for running he almost will think that you are wildlife. One bite and your clothes are shattered. Yes, in those cases you really have to talk with people.”

Crowding can also result in dangerous situations. During the observations it was seen for example that when a couple of mountain bikers were looking on their phones for navigation they did not pay attention to the pedestrians anymore, with the consequence that they almost biked over a dog. To name another example, runners and pedestrians often have to make use of the same routes in Heumensoord. Multiple times it was noted that runners had to slalom around dogs to prevent stepping on them. One of the runners even got bit in the ankle by a dog when he was running. Crowding mainly appeared near the entrances, where different users groups have to use the same paths.

Runners were asked what an area needed in order to meet their wishes and requirements. They said that it was important for them to be able to walk undisturbed. And, even more importantly, to be able to run in a safe environment. They did not want to have to pay attention to where they could run all the time. As Lengkeek (1996) suggests, the attractiveness of an area is dependent on the extent to which the area fulfils the function that is required by the individual. In this case, other users, specifically dog owners, create an unsafe environment for runners. This also prevents them from coming into ‘the experience of flow’ (Cohen, 2010; Hayllar, 2003). When runners constantly need to pay attention to the environment they not have the opportunity to blend the self with the surroundings. Furthermore, the athletes said to prefer a natural area because it provides them a sense of freedom. They can go almost wherever they want to go, and whenever they want to do it. They are not restricted to the opening times of the athletics track and have more space than in the city. The athletes were the ones who had the most trouble with encountering larger numbers of visitors. These numbers caused them to experience a lessened feeling of freedom. This also influenced the feeling of being in a natural area. Some of the respondents indicated that it now rather feels like sporting in a city park. This shows beyond a certain visitor level the quality of the outdoor recreation experience is diminished to an unacceptable degree (Manning, 2010). The runners are not only influenced by the level of crowding, but also require well-maintained paths and challenges in the environment. This will be further elaborated in the following section where the experience of nature and landscape will be discussed. Runners that went out on the weekends, but in the early morning, reported to be less bothered by the use of other visitors. They seem to come closer to the flow experience. Yet their attention is not primarily focussed on nature, but on their sporting performance:

“It is great to enter the forest in the morning. You are almost the first visitor, and animals are not disturbed yet. It is then really peaceful. It is, however, the case that I try to challenge myself and the ones I am running with. The focus is on the activity and my friends rather than the nature. Sometimes we see animals which is nice, and it makes running much more fun, but it stays in the background.” – man, 51 –

When looking at other users besides the runners, it also is observed that their focus in many cases lies somewhere else than nature. Mountain bikers mainly have the focus on their task (Knopf 1987). One of the mountain bikers said that they had to focus on their task because mountain biking requires a lot of concentration in Heumensoord. The first goal of the ‘nordics’ is to keep fit. But next to that, it was said that one could build up a friendship during Nordic walking. On the other hand, the focus of the pedestrians more often is on nature. Even though they report they are bothered by the high number of visitors, their experience almost seems to be a flow-state when they are walking in more quiet parts of the area: “I love fresh air and the forest. I walked and looked for mushrooms. It was possible to fully enjoy nature.” (woman, 61). Another example of a 65-year-old man:

“I am here often early morning to walk my dog. Now it is not really winter yet, but we had years that it snowed a lot. And when you are in the forests as one of the first, then you could see all the traces of the animals in the snow. And especially when you are the first one, there is a big chance that you walk into a couple of deer. And that is of course amazing. It is a different experience to walk into these beautiful animals. You even forget what you are doing at such moment.”

Especially the dog owners seem to be satisfied with a quiet area where they can walk their dogs. The function they seek at the moment they walk their dogs in the area is fulfilled, which will lead to a preference for, and great attractiveness of the area (Buijs, Pedroli, & Luginbül, 2006).

### Comparing the activities with the visitor profile

All the visitors who came from further away carried out the activity of walking while people living nearby Heumensoord rather did active exercises. Walking and Nordic walking was more done by elderly while running was done by people varying in age between the 25 and 65. Runners were often alone, as well as the mountain bikers. In a minority of the cases mountain bikers were accompanied by one or two other adults but never in large groups. In the majority of the cases families with children were biking. Most of the young adults were walking alone with their dog.

### The experience nature & landscape

As suggested by Bell (2008), many outdoor activities can also be done in an artificial environment. One of the runners explains why he had chosen to train in the forest rather than on a track or a gym:

“The forests are more attractive compared to running on the athletics track. There you can of course also do your training but the weird thing is that people always go into the forest. In my experience, it makes running more fun, because running is generally very boring. There are little game elements included. And with the couper path you can test your progress. The forest allows you to make running a nice and relaxing experience.” – man, 51 –

So in spite of the fact that both an athletics track, as well as a gym, are located right next to Heumensoord, the forests of Heumensoord are more attractive for them. Apparently the natural environment gives an extra dimension to an activity that is quite boring in the first place. This shows that the setting where the recreation takes place is an important part of the whole experience.

In general the visitors of Heumensoord were very satisfied with finding their way, the coherence of the area (preferences matrix of the Kaplans (1998)). The respondents stated: “Within Heumensoord, there are numerous plots because it used to be a production forest. It has a very clear structure. You can clearly see that on the maps. You just say, go left, left, left, and you arrive at the point you started.” (man, 56); “Most people cannot get lost because you can just count down where you are. In the meanwhile, people know the way, there are only a few individuals that still do not get it after ten years.” (woman, 56).

During the observations, I also noticed that the forest is well-structured. When someone follows a route, and will take the wrong path, it is very easy to find the way back to the entrance because of the clear structure. Figure 4.25 shows a part of a map of Heumensoord where it can also be seen how structured the paths are laid out. The pre-structured area, however, impairs the complexity of the nature. The visual components such as the straight paths, the forest canopy, and the signage in the area, give,



Figure 4.25 Part of map Heumensoord

according to some respondents, a look of a city park rather than a piece of nature:

“It does not feel like nature anymore due to the maintenance work, rather park like. They worked incredibly rigorous in the past period. Then they bring enormous machines into the forest, which destroy many paths and other plants. Also, they make a lot of noises. They should do maintenance works in little, smaller parts, in order to maintain an enjoyable experience in nature. More gradually rather than very rigorously.” – man, 61 –

Interesting is that many people do not know that all these big changes in the landscape are meant to bring back the original state of the area, from the times before it became a production forest. This area contains all kinds of vegetation including parts of moorland and grasslands. There appears to be a communication gap, but this will be further discussed below in this section.

The predetermined structure of Heumensoord does not exactly make people curious to further explore the area. It is already clear where they have to go. That third element of mystery as described in the preference matrix of the Kaplans (1998), seems not entirely be present in the area. The Kaplans, however, argue that mystery is particularly an effective factor in making an area highly favoured.

People are satisfied with the legibility of Heumensoord, the fourth element of the preference matrix. For example: “There is a sandpit and parts with coniferous and deciduous forest as well as moorland. The advantage of this is that it is easy to orientate. It is easy to meet with friends in the middle of the area. ” (man, 56). It shows that the area has recognisable landmarks. The sandpit (figure 4.26), as well as the old firing



Figure 4.26 Sandpit Heumensoord



Figure 4.27 Fire wall Heumensoord

walls<sup>5</sup> (figure 4.27), are often used by runners, Nordics, and pedestrians. They create a nice alternation to the structured paved routes that are laid out in the biggest part of the area. The sandpit, for example, has heavy, beach-like sand, which is useful for training the legs, according to several respondents. Nordic walkers use them for so called ‘half round exercises’, runners go around and over them, and for the pedestrians they are a nice climb.

During the interviews, a waterfall of comments was made concerning the firing walls. This landmark appeared to be a memorable place for certain visitors. They see the walls as ‘their’ hills since they use them most. For that reason, people are very concerned with these hills and have very definite opinions about what must be done with them. According to many athletes the quality of the firing walls is decreasing due to:

“They have more or less blocked the hills with a very dense vegetation and tree trunks. As a result we can no longer use the hills for sporting purposes. Yet the original firing walls were ideal. They gave height variation in the landscape, a nice element that you can use for sports.” – man, 56 –

---

<sup>5</sup> These walls were used to catch the bullets of militaries that were training with shooting on targets they put in front of the walls.

Most of these athletes are frequent visitors and saw how these walls changed, as they first were usable hills. It shows that the theory of de Vries (2009) about appropriation of an area when an individual regularly visits it, plays a dominant role here. In one of the interviews, it even literally came forward: "It really feels like this is *óur* forest." It is interesting to see that people who directly and / or indirectly claim the ownership of the area, also have a more explicit opinion about the changes within the area over the past years. The athletes attach a lot of value to these elements in nature, as those elements are the challenging components in their training. According to Cohen (2010) and Ewert (1994) the degree of challenge is crucial for the experience. To come into a flow, a match between the level of skill and the degree of challenge of the task is required. The athletes used to be very satisfied with these elements as they provided the right degree of challenge. Now one of these elements threatens to fade away, which is, according to these authors, an explanation why the athletes are not experiencing flow. The degree of challenge lies too low.

Respondents were also asked if they missed something in the area in terms of activities and facilities. They never mentioned a need for participating in certain activities with, for example, the local foresters. They are much more focused on their own goal, rather than to learn something about nature. They do not want to take the effort to learn something about the area by participating in a separate activity. What they do appreciate is that when they take part in a training group, the trainer of the group shares his or her knowledge of nature with the participants during the breaks.

Concerning facilities, respondents said they did not miss anything. However, they mentioned several facilities that could enhance their experience. The visitors would for example very much appreciate an extra water tap:

"What would be great is to have an extra water tap. Now there is one water tap located nearby the gliding field. There is a man living there, I know him, and he built a water tap for the users of Heumensoord because he really enjoys that people recreate there. It has been there for years now and it is always open. You can push it and when you are thirsty you can drink something there. With good weather it is always used. Especially in the summer, because many people sport in Heumensoord and make use of it. When you get warm, you can drink something and you do not have to take water with you. I think that people really would appreciate one at the other end of Heumensoord. It is easy for the people who walk the dog. Next to the athletes, the pedestrians can also make use of it." – woman, 61 –

Another improvement that the visitors would like to see is to get rid of the muddy paths. For the logging, it is necessary to use big machines that damage part of the road network. Next to that, visitors blame different user groups for using the wrong paths. For example, they claim that the mountain bikers ruin the paths of the pedestrians. During the research period, visitors that did Nordic walking:

"We need a little bit more space than a normal pedestrians, because we have the sticks with us. Also, we prefer to walk side by side which requires even more space. The pools that formed on the paths in the meanwhile are more and more often impassable. We have to walk around them which also damages parts of the nature because a lot of people have to create their own side paths to avoid going through the puddle." – woman, 61 –

Pedestrians with children and strollers had the same experience. This is not only an inconvenience for the visitor, but it also influences their experience negatively and is also damaging the nature.

### **Information and signing**

As indicated above, there were visitors who commented on the logging of the forest. At most of the entrances, however, information signs such as figure 4.28 were located to inform people about this logging. People just seem either not to read it or there is not enough or the correct information provided. During the observations around one of the entrances, it was never seen that people looked

at this information sign. At moments visitors did look at the information provided at the entrance, it was on the other panel that showed a map of the area and its highlights. It was also noticed that there was no other place where people could find additional information about the logging. The Natuurmonumenten website, as well as other related websites, do not provide information about the logging and other related topics such as the nature policy of Heumensoord.

Furthermore, interviewees indicated that there is a lack of information sharing. The information that is shared with them is not the information they are looking for. Especially

now only recently Natuurmonumenten took over the management of Heumensoord. Some of the visitors who recreate in Heumensoord for already more than 20 and sometimes 30 years were only little involved with this transfer. The information that was provided about this change was confusing or at least, turned out to be perceived differently in practice:



Figure 4.28 Information sign forestry works Heumensoord

“The area must have challenging elements for practicing sports. The area satisfied my needs until Natuurmonumenten took over the management of the area. At that time, Natuurmonumenten organised an information evening in which the association assured that nothing would change for the users of the forest. In practice, it has been found that Natuurmonumenten had a hidden agenda. After the take-over, almost all paths for the cyclists were closed.” – man 61 –

This did not only have a bad impact on the experience visitors had in Heumensoord, but even had an influence on the memberships of the association:

“Me and my friends were members of Natuurmonumenten. We have terminated our memberships after recent measures were taken, which we believe are ridiculous (hobby of some freaks and money wasters of Natuurmonumenten) and furthermore differs from what Natuurmonumenten has promised when taking over this area.” – man 56 –

A lot of visitors would have liked to be more involved with the transition, and now like to become more involved with the management and maintenance of Heumensoord.

Another remarkable issue in Heumensoord concerning the information provided by Natuurmonumenten, was that at the moment the interviewees started to talk about the management of the area, four participants named Staatsbosbeheer in their story. So next to the complaints about the information sharing they do not know who is actually maintaining the area.

Next to the fact that visitors would like to see an improvement in the information sharing and involvement, also some comments were made on the route signing. Bell (2008) also stresses the importance of route signing and the information provided in a natural area. Natuurmonumenten provides different signed routes for pedestrians in the Heumensoord, starting at different entrances. The observations were focused at the yellow route around the gliding field and the red route starting at the other side of Heumensoord. Noticeable for the longer red route was that at multiple points along the route the signing was not clear. The shorter yellow route starting at the gliding field was indicated very well. Only the exact starting point was hard to find. There is also a signed route available for mountain bikers, which is connected with other ATB routes in the areas around Heumensoord. Mountain bikers were happy with the route itself, only the signing could be improved:



“Signing could especially be improved for the non-locals.” (man, 47); “As ATB-er you are dependent of the signed routes. It was quite okay but sometimes also very confusing.” (man, 45).

When mountain bikers get off-track (by accident), they easily arrive at the paths that are used by the pedestrians and runners, which creates dangerous situations. I also observed that a group of mountain bikers could not find the beginning of their path. To navigate, they watched their phones and at the same time they were cycling on the paths used by pedestrians. A little dog almost got run over because the mountain bikers did not pay attention to their surroundings. Therefore, it was argued by most visitors that they would prefer to have the signage for the mountain bikers clearer. First-time visitors especially prefer that the signed Natuurmonumenten routes are indicated clearly. The frequent visitors require clear ATB routes so that they are less bothered by mountain bikers on their ‘own’ paths, and well-demarcated areas where dogs are allowed to walk unleashed. However, it was often mentioned that the natural area must stay natural and not become a sign park.

### The recreational experience

In general, visitors were often motivated to visit the area by push factors rather than pull factors (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010). The activity they undertook was organised by themselves, such as walking the dog, or running. The natural surrounding seemed to play a décor role rather than a reason for visiting Heumensoord.

In the theoretical framework (chapter two) it was suggested that the mood of people is a dimension of the recreational experience which influences how people experience their environment and their activity. Therefore, the participants were also asked what kind of emotions they experience during the presence in the area. In general the natural surrounding had such a good influence on them so that their mood was very positive at the end of their visit. Yet, also most of the respondents experienced moments with irritation, for example because of crowding. This, however, did not seem to interfere with their positive mood. Also, the presence of certain animals influenced the emotions. For example:

“Yes, I walked into a group of boar once. That was not fun. I was scared because I was afraid they were going to attack us. Luckily nothing happened. Those animals were 20 meters away, but I had the feeling that they were watching me, or that they were planning to attack me. But at the end they just continued with their walk. But for a moment you think if there are six boar in front of you... if you make them aggressive... that is dangerous.”

– man, 56 –

In the end, the man had positive memories of the event because it was so special, something that he would think of for years. This is a perfect example what McIntyre & Roggenbuck (1998) try to show with their theory that an experience of fear can also turn out to enthusiasm. At the same time this illustrates how the level of arousal can be quite directly influenced by stimuli of the surroundings (Bingé et al., 2008; Russel, 1980).

Another dimension that influences the recreational experience as discussed in the theoretical framework is the triggering of the senses. Respondents were asked to what extent the senses of touch, taste, smell, see and hear were triggered. Multiple comments were made on the nearby-located shooting lane. Regularly, shots are fired, which can be heard through a big part of the region, so also in Heumensoord. This does not enhance the experience of the visitors and in many cases keeps them from completely immersing in nature. Those sounds keep reminding them that there are a busy city and other villages around the natural area. This is especially the case for the people who walk their dogs and the older visitors who are aware of the history of Heumensoord. Athletes with a focus on the activity are often not bothered by these sounds because:

“When I run I have my earplugs in, to listen to music. So I have heard little of the nature sounds. But I like to see the autumn colours and the trees that lose their multi-coloured leaves. This contributes to a satisfying feeling after running.” – man, 28 –

The athletes that have their focus mainly on the activity, and use nature more as décor, still said that nature triggered their senses positively. This contributed to a satisfying feeling during and after their activity. The nature helps to fulfil their needs. Most people mention the fresh smell of forest and the good weather, as sensations positively contributing to their experience. One of the informants even said that when he felt the sun shining on his face in the morning when he started running, it felt he was walking in a little paradise. One interviewee sometimes participates in a Nordic walking training in Heumensoord and said: “People like to breathe in the fresh forest air, and they do that also consciously. They suggest it, ‘this is a nice day today, you should take a deep breath, it is so fresh’. You notice that people are conscious of this.” (woman, 61). This case shows that sight and smell are the senses that mostly trigger the more active visitors. Hearing does not play a significant role for them since they are often working out with music in their ears. The sense of hearing is negatively triggered for the other visitors because of the shooting lane. However, the scenic beauty, the autumn colours and the fresh air give visitors a feeling of satisfaction.

The visitors who recreate in Heumensoord for already more than 20 or 30 years, almost all know the stories of Heumensoord. They know what the area was used for and who the owners were. Younger informants often did not know anything about what kind of biodiversity habits in Heumensoord nor anything about the history. They only know of the presence of the Roman guarding tower, but do not know the story behind it. In general the younger respondents do not really care about this kind of information. A difference was noticed between these two groups. The ‘older generation’ attached much more value to the place. They were the ones that called it ‘our’ forest, and they also had a more definite opinion about the maintenance and management of the area. As Blizard and Schuster explain (2007), knowing more about the background enhances the historical recognition of a place leading to engagement with the place. The older people appreciate Heumensoord more because of its history, which contributes to their experience. The ‘younger’ group that had less knowledge of the history of Heumensoord was asked if they would be interested in getting to know more about the background of the area. They, however, answered that they did not have the need for cultural-historical and natural history stories. Rather they are looking for the landscape to fulfil the function they need for practicing their sport. They are only interested when information is provided to them at the right moment relevant for their activity.

A returning point coming up in the interviews and questionnaires is the presence of dogs. The visitors indicated that dogs that were not under the control of their owners often bothered them. Also, the dog’s excrements did not contribute to carrying out their activity. Most of the respondents would like to see that dog owners collect and dispose their dog’s mess. They suggest to put units with dog bags and bins for the bags at the most popular entrances, especially the ones close to areas where dogs are allowed unleashed.

Concluding from the above, the athletes who focus on their sports activity have quite a different experience than people who came with another motive to Heumensoord. They seem to be more open to their surrounding and in many cases also know more about it.

### **Segmentation**

Based on the visitor profile and the information gained from discussing the motivations, experience of activities, the experience of nature and landscape, and the recreational experience, it looks like there is a dichotomy of lifestyle segments. Namely, the quiet green and the entrepreneurial purple lifestyle

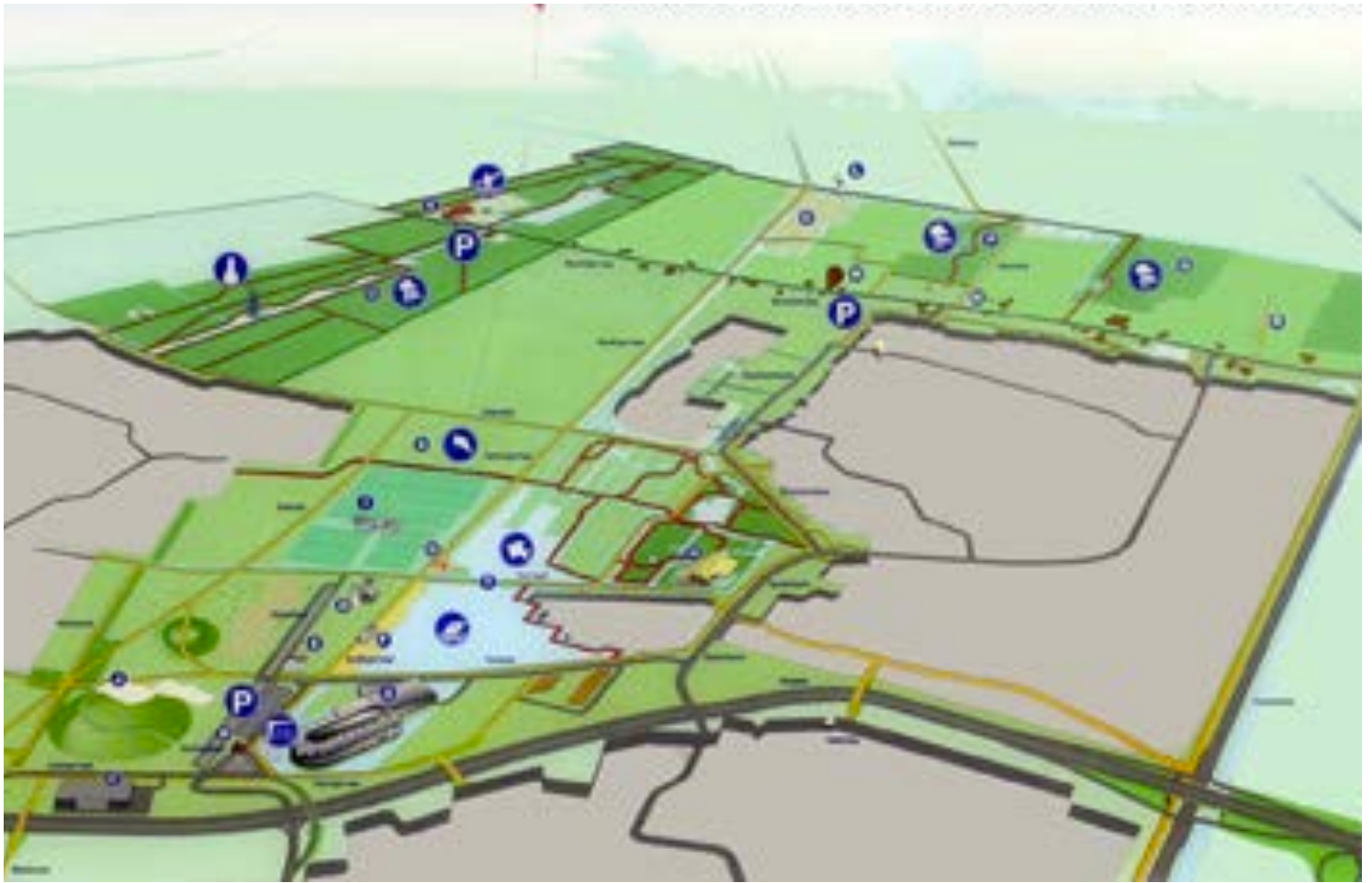
group. The older age group that has recreated for more than 20 years in Heumensoord can be characterised as the quiet green segment of the visitors. They are sober and serious, and often had the motive to get away from the daily routines when recreating in Heumensoord. What is characteristic for the quiet green segment is that they think that in the past everything was better (SmartAgent, 2012a). For example, many of them preferred the 'old' way Heumensoord was managed and maintained. The entrepreneurial purple visitors are recognisable through their sportive, more active activities that are done by young individuals. They often visited the area alone and came across as intelligent people with a critical view. They prefer their freedom in the forest, and that you not always fully have to behave according to the rules. In the area a few adaptations (i.e. the couper path) have been made for the athletes to meet their needs. They are, however, not entirely satisfied yet. Many comments were made about the lack of challenge due to the erosion of the firing walls. Also, the paths that became big pools of mud and water due to construction works restrict them from coming into a flow. Even though most of the respondents seem to be part of one of the two most dominant segments, there are still many visitors that can be either in both segments or do not fit in any segments. There are also people who regularly walk the dog in Heumensoord and once a week are more active and go running in the area. It is hard to fit a suitable lifestyle segment of the segmentation model to them.

### **Conclusion Heumensoord**

Overall, the pedestrians seem to have the most satisfying experiences in Heumensoord. Only small changes, for example by adding certain facilities and information provision, would enhance their experiences even more. Other visitors, particularly the athletes, experience several irritations during their visit. For them, many improvements can be made in order to enhance their recreational experience. The maintenance of the firing walls is number one priority of the athletes. Many different kinds of athletes use them for their exercises, and, therefore, they find it relevant to keep the hills open and stop them from eroding. Furthermore, they require clear areas for the unleashed dogs, and separate paths that are well indicated. For most of the visitors counts that they want to be more involved in the management and maintenance of Heumensoord.

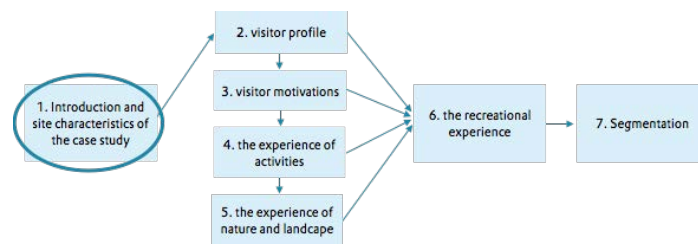


## 4.4 Kardinge





This part will discuss the findings of the research case Karding. This part will also follow the structure that was explained in the introduction of this chapter. This structure is illustrated in figure 4.1.



Karding is located close to the city of Groningen (figure 4.29) in the province of Groningen<sup>6</sup>. Karding is a young but varied area including forests, meadows, marshes and puddles. The meadows full of flowers attract several kinds of birds that often hatch along the paths. Birds that can be spotted in Karding include the Kingfisher, the Reed Warbler and the Screech Owl. Parts of the meadows are deposited as grazing areas for the Hereford cattle. This species of cow helps against the dense growth of plants within the area, and in this way creates space for the grassland birds. The manure of the cows is attractive for all kinds of insects such as dung beetles (de Wekker, 2012).

**A quick overview of Karding**

- 244 hectares next to the city of Groningen.
- Everyone is free to walk and bike on the roads and paths.
- The parking lot of the gym nearby can be used.
- Walkable from the bus station transferium Karding.
- Walking and biking routes present.
- Most paths are accessible for wheelchair users.
- Dogs must be leashed.
- No visitor centre present. But there is a café, sport centre, and tourist office.
- There is a special 4 mile run for runners.

Figure 4.29 Overview Karding

## Facilities

The area allows for numerous activities such as picnicking, walking, kiting, trimming, roller blading, or swimming. The area is very accessible with the multiple entrances and the enormous amount of parking spots next to the training centre of Karding, close to the Karding hill. This parking lot is also attainable via public transport. There are several trimming trails to practise for amongst other the annual ‘four miles of Groningen’ (figure 4.30). The starting points of the training track are shown on an information panel. People who choose for a walk in the area have 45 kilometres of maintained paved and unpaved paths at their disposition, of which 25 kilometres are parts of marked routes. The area provides five longer and shorter routes. Together with the locals, Natuurmonumenten designed and constructed so-called ‘plukbossen’: areas where visitors can pick flowers and fruits. In the winter birds benefit from all the seeds that were produced by the flowers and fruits in the summer. In the ‘plukbossen’, information panels (figure 4.31) inform visitors about what is growing there and when it can be picked. Even though there is no mountain bike trail in Karding, mountain bikers are free to cross from the Karding Mountain (figure 4.32). This high mountain is very popular for langlauding and sledging when covered with snow. During other seasons, it is a popular challenge for bootcampers and trimmers. At the top of the mountain, a watchtower can be found which provides a view over the

<sup>6</sup> For the ones that are not familiar with the Netherlands; both the city as well as the province are called Groningen.

whole of Kardinge and the skyline of Groningen. For cyclists, there are fifteen kilometres of paved roads accessible. The ones that want to visit Kardinge by boat can follow a marked route of five kilometres long. Along the roads, many picnic tables and benches are available. Often benches are placed at sites that provide a nice view of the area.



Figure 4.30 Four mile route Kardinge



Figure 4.31 Info panel Plukbossen



Figure 4.32 Karding Mountain

The foresters of Karding regularly organise events. Some of them do not require registration or a participation fee beforehand, such as the recent winter hike excursion (Natuurmonumenten, 2015b). At the end of 2014, a midwinter light tour was organised to experience the shortest day of the year. This is an example of a paid event. As usual Natuurmonumenten members have to pay less than non-members.

### Recreation and recreation policy

The area is divided into three different zones. One zone is meant for intensive recreation including biking trails, a recreation hill and a pitch & put lane for golfers, all located between Beijum en Leewenborg. The zone located around the village of Noorddijk and surroundings forests is meant for the maintenance and development of the landscape, nature and cultural heritage. The third zone is situated in the middle of the other two zones in the Dwarsdijkerbos and the south of Beijum. This zone functions as transfer zone that combines the green character of the area with recreation (de Wekker, 2012). For the future, it is meant to further develop an accessible and attractive recreation and nature area close to the city. In the area, space for both intensive recreation and sports and extensive recreation must be created. Local users are valued because it is nature close to the city. Therefore, it is desirable to adapt the recreation experience to the needs and wishes of the locals and frequent users.

### Cultural heritage

Valuable cultural elements in Karding are the historical patterns of ditches (in Dutch: 'slootpatronen') and the wideness of the landscape around the noticeable mill. The mill (figure 4.33) originated from 1864 and functioned as a hiding place for the Jewish during the Second World War. Since its restoration in 1980, the mill is not functional anymore as a grinding mill. Goats are placed around to mill to keep the area free from trees so that the mill is still able to catch the wind (Natuurmonumenten, 2014g). The historical village Noorddijk is situated in Karding. In this village, there are beautiful old farms with large willows and elms in their yards (Bijlsma, Boersma, & Rotstein, 2002). The part in Karding that mainly consists of forest was constructed after the liberation, for honouring the Canadian soldiers. In this forest, there is a lake with in the middle the Canadian maple leaf (figure 4.34).

### Lifestyle segmentation

The people that live around Karding are mainly situated in the city of Groningen. As figure 4.35 shows, the city predominantly includes the entrepreneurial purple lifestyle segment. It was, therefore, expected that many people from this category would be observed in Karding. This will be

further discussed in 'visitor profiles' below. The share of other lifestyle groups in Karding is relatively equal to the lifestyles on the national level.



Figure 4.33 Karding mill and goats (Natuurmonumenten; Geert de Schipper)



Figure 4.34 Maple leaf to honour the Canadian soldiers (Natuurmonumenten; Martin van Lokven)



Figure 4.35 Lifestyle segments Groningen (SmartAgent, 2012)

## Visitor profile

In Karding, a total of six surveys were filled out and two interviews were conducted. This small number of participants illustrates the fact that the majority of the people were not interested to participate in the research. They did not want to spend their time on the research nor did they see how they could contribute to this research. Due to this, it was unfortunately not possible to get respondents from all user groups within Karding. Eventually, mainly pedestrians were asked, two runners and an individual that had just participated in a boot camp training in Karding. Visitors were asked to report in which municipality they currently lived. Remarkably (compared to the three previous cases), all visitors came from the city of Groningen. For that reason, the visitors' demographics were compared to the statistics of the city of Groningen. This comparison was made to see if the visitors are a representative sample of the population. The average age of the respondents was 41. This is much higher than the mean age of the 'Groningers' where most of the people are between the 20 and 24 years old. This low average age is due to the fact that Groningen is a student city, showing significant peaks in the age groups of twenty and thirty (Onderzoek en Statistiek Groningen, gemeente Groningen, 2014). Remarkably, during the observation, I did not see many visitors that looked like they were between 20 and 24. 46 Percent of the households exists of students (O&S Groningen RUG/HHG, 2014). Mainly in the age group 20 to 24 there are more women than men. In the age group above that, 25 to 29 years, there are more men than women. The Municipality of Groningen knows that more women than men leave the city after finishing their studies (Onderzoek en Statistiek Groningen, gemeente Groningen, 2014). This may also explain why just over half of the respondents in Karding was male. Furthermore, only two of the respondents visited Karding once a month or a couple of times per year. All the other respondents were weekly visitors. Half of the participants visited Karding by themselves, and the other half was accompanied by another adult, a bigger group, or their family including children. In Karding, it was the first time that foreign visitors were seen in a natural area. They were both accompanied by a Dutch visitor but both hardly spoke Dutch or English. This made it very hard to communicate with them. One of the foreigners was not willing to help, while the other one was enthusiastic but struggled with expressing himself in a foreign language. Another remarkable element worth mentioning was that only one of the eight respondents had a membership of Natuurmonumenten.

## Visitor motivation

Most pedestrians had a similar motivation namely to walk the dog. This can be characterised as a typical pull factor (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010) because it is a reason for leaving home. The other pedestrian that did not walk the dog indicated that she was there to get away from the busy life from the city and to relax in nature. Dog owners were also asked why they walked their dog in nature rather than in for example the city or a park. They all indicated that walking in nature gave the feeling

of peace and serenity, it relaxes, which is something that the city or the park does less. Athletes were also explicit in their reason for visiting nature. They went into nature for physical exercise. The natural area gave them the feeling of freedom and that they could go wherever they wanted to go and do whatever they wanted to do.

### **Motivations for visiting Karding**

Visitors were also asked what motivated them to visit Karding specifically. Their primary motivation was, just like the previously discussed cases, to visit Karding because it is nearby their homes. Next to that advantage, it is also one of the bigger green areas in the surroundings of Groningen:

“Specifically nice of Karding is that it is very close by. Within ten minutes running from the sport centre you are... well... in the middle of ‘nature’. It is no super nature or wilderness but it is something green. It is nice to spend time there. And you do hear birds, and there are no cars. That is the most enjoyable, that is it just close by my neighbourhood and easy to walk. Because further away in Groningen, there is not much forest or park like areas. They are all cultural landscapes. For something similar you have to go in the direction of Drenthe or Zuid Laren, there is something with forest. But around Groningen there is not much.” – man, 33 –

From this quote it can be concluded that another reason for going to Karding was because there is nothing similar to go to in the nearby surroundings. One pedestrian had a second motive next to the fact that Karding was located nearby his house: “The area meets my expectations, there is something for everyone. It is a combination of nature, sport and relaxation that make the area nice and enjoyable.” (man, 59). He emphasises that there are certain facilities the area offers that convinces the visitors to come to that destination. According to Cutler and Carmichael (2010) such motivation can be categorised as a pull factor. Another pull factor is the Karding Mountain. There are people that visit Karding especially for the mountain because it is a challenge for them to climb it.

### **The experience of activity**

Karding was popular amongst people who walk their dog and runners. I also observed training groups performing boot camp like exercises and here and there a lonely mountain biker. The runners were mainly spotted on the paved paths, including the four-mile parcours. Some of them challenged themselves and ran up and down the mountain path. Dog owners were also found on the smaller paths between the grasslands and sometimes the unpaved paths. The mountain bikers were only seen around and upon the mountain.

Except for two comments on the number of visitors, people seemed not to be bothered by the number of other users of the area. Observations, however, revealed that some parts of the area were used by a lot of people while other parts were very quiet. On the often used paths, people experienced moments of irritation because of other visitors. Furthermore, visitors were asked to indicate on a map, which route they were taking during their visit. This showed that many people stayed on the paved paths. Half of the respondents went up the mountain.

The pedestrians in Karding look for an experience that brings them relaxation and serenity next to the fact that they can walk their dog there. It seems that Karding meets their first need: “Karding is an area where I can walk a couple of times a day, but it does not become boring.” (man 59); “In Karding I can just be outside at the places where it is quiet.” (woman, 32); “Karding offers me that what I seek in nature; sun, wind, brightness and a little bit of cold.” (woman, 41). These people are satisfied with what the nature offers them. However, when they were asked whether they could fulfil their function well, which was in many cases, walking the dog, they sounded more negative. In most cases, people would prefer areas where their dog could walk unleashed. Furthermore, there was a respondent who was walking in Karding with her husband and child in a stroller. They usually walk a

specific round on the paved paths as they do not have information if the other trails are accessible for strollers. They would love to come closer to the animals, but do not dare to take the risk since some paths do not look accessible for strollers.

The bootcampers are also very satisfied with Kardingé because the nature in Kardingé provides everything that is necessary for a good boot camp training. They are looking for objects in nature such as hanging branches, tree trunks, benches and different soil types. The boot campers like Kardingé so much that it is not necessary for them to go to other areas to meet their needs. It is plausible that bootcampers get in a state of flow (Hallyar, 2003) but this is hard to determine based on only the experiences of only one interviewee. This shows that the preference for a natural area is dependent on the extent to which the area fulfils the function of what individuals are looking for (Buijs, et al., 2006).

### Linking the activity with the visitor profile

People of all ages walked their dog or went trimming. Also, a gender balance was evident among most activities. The two individual mountain bikers that were seen during the observations were both men. Remarkable is that not one of the activities was practised by a younger audience while almost half of the population from Groningen has the age between 20 and 24.

### The experience of nature & landscape

There is a clear division between how the pedestrians and the athletes experience nature and landscape. It looks like the pedestrians are more open to experience the different elements in nature, while the athletes 'use' nature. The respondent who regularly participates boot camp training in Kardingé explained:

"We use nature, we do our exercises based on the possibilities nature offers. We stand and jump on all kinds of trees. Or try to hang as long as possible on a tree, or run around it. In the low grass, you can do stuff as well. So we do use it as nature, but not so much to look at. But we use it and that is actually really fun that you can make use of the things nature offers." – man, 42 –



Figure 4.36 Open field Kardingé

This shows that nature is used as a décor: it has a function for another purpose. They are mainly focused on their activity and let the nature help them to complete this activity. The pedestrians are more focussed on the nature itself as they say nature helps them to relax and offers them an escape from the daily grind.

Concerning the first element of the matrix – coherence – the case study shows that the respondents can readily discern the presence of several distinct areas within Kardingé. Namely, the forest, the mountain, the paved mile path and the part with the unpaved paths. This organisation of different areas adds to a perceived coherence of the setting, the first element of the preference matrix. Visitors said that the area was easy to overview and easy to understand because of the different parts each having characteristic elements. Concerning the second informational factor, the complexity of the landscape, visitors are less satisfied. The respondents said that Kardingé was quite monotonous. This can be explained by the fact that the research took place in the fall. Next to this, the Kaplans also suggest large, open expanses do not offer different visual components. As figure 4.36 shows, parts of Kardingé indeed exist of large open expanses. This probably explains why visitors do not experience a richness of elements in the setting. One of the



runners also said that he would prefer to have less of these open spaces. Next to the fact that the wind can sometimes make it very cold because of the lack of trees and other objects, it also is less intimate and natural. This may also be due to the fact that the area is still very young, like one of the visitors suggest himself: “It is still a very young natural area... and now it is slowly acclimatising to a full natural area.” (man, 59).

Next to the differentiation in plants, visitors would also like to see more diversity in the kinds of animals. They really enjoy the presences of animals as these create special, enjoyable, amazing, and memorable moments. Also, multiple comments were made on the diversity of the trees, as well as the quantity of them. For example:

There should be more different kinds of trees and between the fields of de Froukemaheerd and the sport fields there should be more trees. They should fill them up with ferns, shrubs and trees. Then we will probably also see more diversity in the animals such as deer, hares and birds. They will feel more at home there. – woman, 59 –

This quote illustrates that according to the visitors, Kardingel lacks a rich biodiversity. They would like to see an improvement especially in the diversity of plants and trees. They assume that a more diverse landscape also would attract more kinds of animals.

The legibility factor in the preference matrix scored relatively high in Kardingel. There is hardly the possibility to get lost because of a yellow climbing wall that is visible from almost any point in the natural area. Figure 4.37 also shows how the wall at the middle right side of the illustration towers over the landscape. It has become a memorable component that helps with orientation and finding the way back again. It is a unique aspect that is recognisable even if one is not familiar with this place.



Figure 4.37 Yellow climbing wall Kardingel

The fourth component of the preference matrix, mystery, was quite missing. There was a small part of the signed Natuurmonumenten route that led pedestrians through a thick forest, which may suggest forms of mystery. It was, however, the case that the many trees and bushes blocked the view and so lacked mystery and rather provoked confusion. It was not possible to see anything behind the jumble of vegetation and even created problems in way finding. It was observed that no one used this route. However, when looking at the above-discussed motives, none of the respondents mentioned exploring the area as a motive. They find it important that they can safely sport in the area and have a place where their dog can walk around while they can keep an eye on him.

### Facilities

Another question for the respondents was if they missed any facilities in the area. Lengkeek (1996) emphasises the presence of the right facilities as they help to carry out activities. There were visitors that did not have difficulties when carrying out their activity as they did not need many facilities or the facilities were already present. These visitors were mainly the pedestrians. As one of their favourite spots is the big lake, some of them indicated they would appreciate a small coffee house with a terrace that overlooks the lake. However, this is not necessary to complete their activity. The runners requested a more necessary facility:

“Training on different kinds of soils is necessary to prevent injuries. But that is sometimes quite hard, especially in the winter. That is because it is dark and there is not much lighting, especially not on the unpaved paths. During winter time we are therefore obliged to stay on the biking paths.” – man, 33 –

Without the lighting on the initial running paths, it is not possible to carry out the activity the way the trimmers would want to when it is dark. They have to adapt and do not have any alternative. This has a negative influence on the experience of the trimmers. Luckily it was noted that people were very satisfied with the introduction of the four-mile round: “What they did really well is the creation of the four-mile round. It is very much used. Especially towards the summer, when the four-mile run is nearing... then you will see dozens of runners.” (man, 42).

However, for the ones that do not train for the four-mile or another long run, but rather want to stay fit, this path is less suitable. It is nice as a test to check the progress after a certain period. This group, however, attaches more value to the presence of half-paved and unpaved paths. For them, it is important to have physical exercise in a more diverse environment where they can safely carry out their exercises. For that reason, the athletes that have the focus to stay fit would like to see more accessible half-paved and unpaved paths.

### **Information and signing**

Several information panels were put in the natural area. At the parking lot, nearby the entrance to the mountain, an information panel with the signed Natuurmonumenten route and general information on Karding was provided. This panel was placed in a strange spot as it was in the middle of the parking lot and not at the entrance of the natural area. It was also not observed that people were looking at this panel. Other informative panels within the natural area were also rarely used. The explanation for this comes from a 42-year-old man:

“I think there are several information panels, but they are not always easy to read. Often we just pass the panel when running. But I never actually looked at such a panel, at what it tells exactly. Often also because at such moment I am focusing on other things, mainly my sport and sometimes on other people. And yes, then I am not all of a sudden going to stop to read the sign. And I do not really visit the area for other purposes.”

Next to the barely used information panels, it was noticed that there is a lack of communication between the visitors and the foresters. As the area is still quite young, visitors were asked to give input how they would like to see the design of Karding. There were three respondents that participated that ‘feedback group’ who indicated that they found it a pity that they were not involved with the rest of the process. Their input was only asked once, and they were not kept up to date with the outcomes. They would have liked to be more involved with every step of the process and the daily management.

Concerning the signing, Natuurmonumenten created one signed route for pedestrians in Karding. Part of the observations were done along this route. The route seems unsuitable for the vast majority of the visitors. Namely, the route is too long for people who just want to walk their dog, and parts of the route are inaccessible for strollers, people in a wheelchair and people who are infirm. Next to that, several times the directions were unclear. During the observation period, it was also not once seen that someone was taking the Natuurmonumenten route.

### **The recreational experience**

In the conceptual framework, it was suggested that one of the dimensions of an experience is the triggering of the senses, as experience is a multisensory process (Medway, 2015). Remarkable is that the senses of the athletes were triggered differently than the pedestrians. The pedestrians more often reported the sense of noise than the athletes. Namely, the part near the gym, parking lot and

the sport fields were said to be very noisy: "The area is very peaceful. But sometimes there are football matches, and then there is a lot of screaming which you also hear in the natural area." (woman, 59). During the observations, I noticed too that the sounds from the sport games drowned the sounds of nature. I almost felt I was part of the game instead of recreating in nature. The sounds were loud and aggressive, which did not give the visitors a feeling of peace and serenity, while that was their motivation to visit Karding: "For a 'real' walk in nature, this area is still too much bound with the civilization, and there are too many people." (woman, 41).

The athletes did not report to be bothered by any of these sounds. It was observed that approximately half of them were wearing headphones. Also, they are much more focused on their activity. Another dimension of the recreational experience is the personal mood, which can influence experiences and can occur as a consequence of certain experiences (Hull, 1991). There were two respondents that said to feel angry at certain moments during their visit. This was because of several bins that were deliberately destroyed by people. This shows that stimuli of the outside environment indeed have an impact on one's mood and emotions, as Bingé et al. (2008) suggest. When the visitors were asked which impacts the emotions had on their experiences they said to be angry for just a while. Their angry thoughts about the bins did fade away when they continued through the area. Like in the other cases, it shows that even though people have situations in which the experience negative emotions during their visit they eventually did not have a significant effect on the overall recreation experience. In other words, the negative emotions were not strong enough to affect the whole recreational experience.

### **Segmentation**

The entrepreneurial purple lifestyle group was represented most strongly in Karding. In this case, the entrepreneurial purple group can amongst others be recognised because of their love for intense sports that they like to carry out individually. Also, the average age of the respondents is in line with the ages that are characteristic for the entrepreneurial purple group. While the experience of the modest aqua lifestyle group can amongst others be enhanced by informing them about the natural and cultural history, the visitors of Karding do not seem to be attracted by this at all. Rather they look for a natural area that helps them carrying out their activity. They value individual activities and mainly focus on the task and activity rather than on others and / or nature. The signed route set out by Natuurmonumenten does not seem to fit the preferences of the visitors, since not many people are using this path.

Important to note is that this case study showed that within one activity, there are many goals, requirements and experiences. This has implications for the possibility to use the BSR-segments. It is not really logical to assign all these people with different needs and wishes, to the same segment. Even though many of their profiles, such as their demographics, fit in the segment of entrepreneurial purple, it is questionable whether it makes sense to assign them to one segment given the diversity of their needs and wishes.

### **Conclusions Karding**

Quite a diverse public is visiting Karding. All visitors come from the nearby city of Groningen and primary choose to visit the area because it is nearby, and as a second reason, because it is one of the few green areas in the surroundings of the city. The needs of the runners do not yet seem to be fully satisfied yet. They, for example, require street lighting at the half-paved and unpaved paths. People who walk their dog seem to come close to the flow experience. In general, most visitors would appreciate a more diverse biodiversity in the area.

## 4.5 Summary of the experience analysis

In this chapter, the results of the empirical research were presented. The findings of each case study were presented, using figure 4.1 as a structural guideline for the discussion. The aim of researching the case-sites from many theoretical perspectives was to paint a holistic picture of each natural area and its visitors.

References to existing research literature were made when discussing the results. In some cases the literature is corroborated by the empirical findings. Sometimes the empirical reality differs from the conclusions of existing

literature. Also, some models such as the Matrix model from the Kaplans (1998) and push vs. pull (Cutler and Carmichael, 2010), and concepts such as the concept of flow (Hayllar, 2003) and the multi-sensory (Porteous, 1990), appeared to be quite useful to describe and understand the dimensions and aspects of the researched cases.

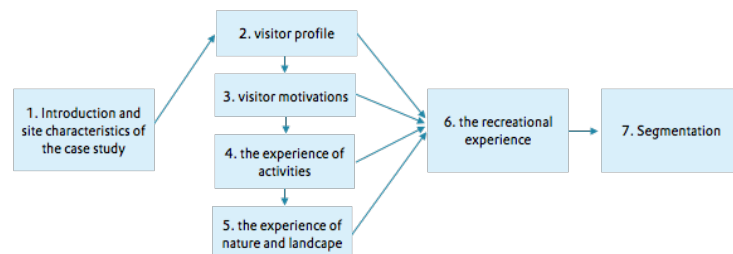


Table 4.1 illustrates a summary of each of the categories that were discussed for every case study.

	Case 1 Zuid-Kennemerland	Case 2 Planken Wambuis	Case 3 Heumensoord	Case 4 Karding
<b>Site Characteristics</b>	National park, visitor centre, forest, dunes and sea, Scottish highlanders, water tap, QR route, cultural heritage from WWII.	Pine tree forest and moorland, teahouse, Spanish cows, poetic biking route, observation points, cultural heritage that reminds WWII.	Forest and grassland, herd of sheep, used to be military grounds, roman sentinel, unleashed areas for dogs, couper path, air-field for gliders.	Open grass area with flowers, Hereford cattle, Karding hill, 'plukbossen', four-mile run, watchtower, grinding mill, monument WWII.
<b>Visitor profile</b>	Families, young adults, elderly, average age 47, usually visiting with two or more persons, slightly more female visitors.	Live nearby PW, almost no one visiting without company, average age 59, often elderly and some families.	Average age 51, majority of visitors from nearby villages, often single visitors, many repeat visitors, majority no NM member.	All respondents lived in city of Groningen, average age 41, over half of them was male, some foreign visitors, majority no NM member.
<b>Visitor motives for visiting nature</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relaxation</li> <li>• Escape</li> <li>• Being together</li> <li>• Feeling of freedom</li> <li>• Enjoy the season</li> <li>• Physical exercise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stay fit</li> <li>• Enjoy nature</li> <li>• Catch up with friends/ relatives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fresh air</li> <li>• Enjoy the season</li> <li>• Relaxation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Walking the dog</li> <li>• Escape</li> <li>• Relaxation</li> <li>• Physical exercise</li> </ul>
<b>Case specific visitor motives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Located nearby</li> <li>• Diversity of nature</li> <li>• Good sport area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Located nearby</li> <li>• Presence of trees</li> <li>• Peace and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Located nearby</li> <li>• Very suitable for physical exercise</li> <li>• Unleashed dog</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Located nearby</li> <li>• Nothing else green in nearby environment</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presence of animals</li> </ul>	serenity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Book about PW</li> </ul>	areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Karding hill</li> <li>• Feeling of freedom</li> </ul>
<b>Activities</b>	Walking, biking, mountain biking, horseback riding, running	Walking, mountain biking, horseback riding	Walking (with dog), mountain biking, Nordic walking, running	Walking, running, bootcamp
<b>Experience of nature</b>	++ Complexity ++ Legibility + Mystery + Triggering all five senses - Coherence - QR-route	+ Coherence + Complexity + Mystery + Presence of animals - Legibility - Quality paths - No consistent signing	+ Coherence + Complexity + Legibility + Challenge + Animals - Mystery - Muddy paths - Maintenance works	++ Coherence ++ Legibility ++ Karding hill - Complexity - Mystery - Variety in road types - Amount and sorts of vegetation not enough
<b>Stories and events</b>	Visitors valued both natural and cultural historical stories and enjoy events organised by foresters. A lot of visitors have personal memories of ZK.	Visitors appreciate the book that is written about PW and value historical stories about WWII in the area.	Many visitors already recreate her for 20 years and have many personal memories. They even consider it 'their' forest.	Visitors in Karding are not interested in natural and cultural historical stories.
<b>Recreational visitor experience</b>	Overall very good, runners come into flow, many paths available, possible to immerse in nature, but: - Communication with visitors - No tailored walking routes --Crowding	Positive experience but not good enough to come in flow. Main entrance very good, but: - Sounds of highway - Decreasing number of visible animals	People very happy with the fact that it is near the big city, and enjoy the great sport opportunities, but: - Rather feel like park than nature --Crowding	Even though the area is still young, there is enough challenge and locals are very satisfied with it, but: - Lack of street lights on less used paths - Noise from football fields
<b>Lifestyle segmentation (p.24)</b>	Mainly modest aqua visitors and exuberantly yellow. ZK fits their profile but can be improved further.	PW is most suitable for the modest aqua and quit green, but needs to improve.	Dichotomy of lifestyle segments of quiet green and entrepreneurial purple. Seems most suitable for purple.	Mainly visited by entrepreneurial purple lifestyle group, which fits Karding. However, are many people who switch between lifestyle groups.

++ Influences the recreational experience very positively  
 + Influences the recreational experience positively  
 - Influences the recreational experience negatively  
 -- Influences the recreational experience very negatively

Table 4.1 Summary of case studies per category

In the following chapter, chapter five, the research question will be answered, final conclusions will be drawn, and recommendations will be given.



# 5

## Conclusion & Recommendations

In this chapter, the research questions of this study will be answered. The conclusions concern three aspects namely the scientific objective, proposals for future research on the topic of recreational experiences in nature and on the practical applications of the results in the form of recommendations.



## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter presents the main research findings using the results of the literature review and the results of the case studies. A critical review of the theories discussed in the theoretical framework is already given in the results chapter. This chapter starts with answering the research sub-questions. Here, the concept of the visitor experience will be discussed and a connection will be made between the site characteristics and the visitor experience. Eventually, these answers of the sub-questions will all be combined answering the research question. The chapter will continue by discussing suggestions for further research that is necessary for future studies in recreational experiences. The chapter concludes with recommendations. In this final section, Natuurmonumenten is provided with suggestions to enhance the current recreational visitor experience in nature.

### 5.1 Research purpose

The research purpose of this study was to acquire knowledge that can generate valuable insights in how, where and with what tools investments can be made to enhance the current recreational visitor experience. In each of the sections below, answers to the sub-questions are given. To start out, I will shortly recount the research questions as originally set out in the introduction chapter:

SQ 1: What is the recreational visitor experience?

SQ 2: What are the site characteristics?

SQ 3: What is the connection between the site characteristics and the recreational visitor experience?

SQ 4: How can the knowledge about the recreational visitor experience, site characteristics and current trends contribute to the improvement of the future recreational visitor experience?

The general research question for this inquiry was:

*How can Natuurmonumenten enhance the recreational visitor experience of the people who recreate at her properties?*

An answer to the questions one to four will be given based on the results of the case studies, thus generalising these 'local' findings to more generic patterns and insights. Figure 5.1, provides an overview of the subjects that were researched (shown in dark orange). Also, the major assumptions as stated in the introduction of this report, are illustrated in this overview (light orange).

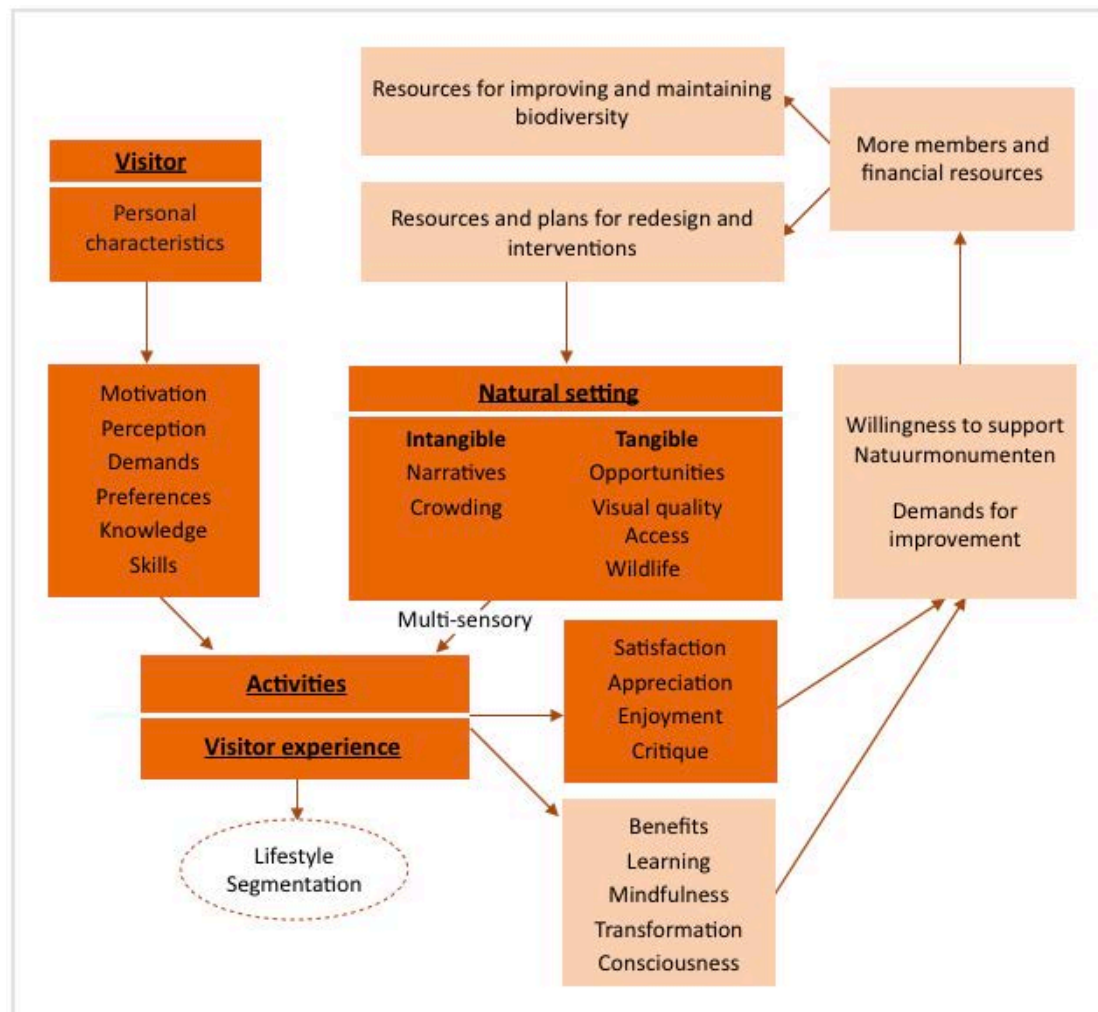


Figure 5.1 Overview of subjects researched in this thesis (dark orange) and the major assumptions made (light orange)

### The recreational visitor experience (SQ1)

The concept of ‘the recreational visitor experience’, as this thesis shows, refers to a highly complex phenomenon. It is influenced by many different factors. How someone experiences a natural area is partly dependent on the visitor’s personal characteristics, but also on the recreational activity, on site characteristics and personal memories. Other elements that appear to play a role in the recreational experience are the perception of the visitor, the visitor’s mood, the focus of attention and the triggering of the senses. Given that so many factors play a role, a holistic view of the visitor experience is needed, containing as many of these aspects as possible. During a visit the experience can change because of influences on the emotions and changes in the focus of attention of the visitors. The ultimate experience is seen when someone comes into a state of flow (Hayllar, 2003), where the self and the environment merge. The subjective states of individual experiences are unique; a theoretical observation that was confirmed by the empirical results. It was clear that people who involved in the same activities could have very different motives and experiences related to these activities. In general sense it seems that a rough distinction can be made between on the one hand ‘slow’ visitors (mainly pedestrians, horseback riders) who see the contact with nature as their primary aim and ‘fast’ visitors (bikers, mountain bikers, runners, bootcampers) who focus primarily on their activities and tasks, relating to nature as a scenic context in which they are active or a functional context for performing their activities. An example of a very satisfying experience for a ‘slow’ visitor is when the signage of the routes are clear and one can smell, and hear nature, instead of groups of noisy people, taking a lot of space in the natural area. Depending on the area, the presence of animals

is also a major contributor to the recreational experience of the 'slow' visitor. This kind of visitor gets into a flow when one can fully immerse in nature without being bothered by others except for their friends and family. Negative experiences are often influenced by crowding and by routes that are not tailored to the needs of the slow visitor. A 'fast' visitor, for example a mountain biker, will have a very positive experience when the mountain biking paths are of high quality and just challenging enough to improve the skills. Even though the nature will function as décor, an excellent portrait surrounding where one can practice the skills is preferred. Negative experiences for fast visitors are when there is not enough space to practice the skills, or when other users enter 'their' paths. For the fast visitors, changes in the landscape can have both a negative as well as a positive influence on the experience. In the case of Heumensoord, for example, the decreasing access to the fire walls was experienced negatively by different types of fast users, since it was one of the few places in Heumensoord where they could get their challenge. On the other hand, as many mountain bikers in Planken Wambuis for example indicated, changes in the landscape can also create new opportunities for testing the skills. The fast visitors will find their flow experience when the paths provide just enough challenge so that the activity and the environment can merge. It is, however, important to realise that there are also different types of slow and fast visitors, all having different needs and wishes.

### **Site characteristics and their impact on the recreational experience (SQ2 & SQ3)**

The setting in which people recreate has a considerable influence on the visitor experience. Of foremost importance is the location of the natural recreation destination (nearby where people live). This aspect was most valued in all of the research cases. Next to the location, the two most crucial features of the natural setting (especially for the 'slow' visitors) are the diversity of the landscape and the presence of animals. In every research area, these respondents seemed to be quite satisfied with the extent to which these features were present. Especially in Zuid-Kennemerland and Planken Wambuis for some visitors the presence of animals was the core motivation to specifically visit these areas. The animals enhance their experience because people are motivated to go and explore them and experience amazement when they find them. In Karding, the interviewed visitors wish more diversity in plants and animals, as the plants offer more protection against the wind and create a more cosy feeling. With the often-returning open wide spaces, people experienced boredom. More plants, as well as animals, would take this feeling away and create a more enjoyable experience. In the cases of Zuid-Kennemerland, Heumensoord and Karding, also high levels of crowding were reported. People were not only annoyed by the amounts of other people they had to share the natural area with, in some cases they also felt less safe. This contributes to a less satisfying experience.

Coming to the biggest problems in terms of the site characteristics, especially the lack of certain facilities (like landmarks) and the information provision are often mentioned. Facilities and the information sharing within the natural setting appear to be very important elements that can enhance the recreational experience, but at the same time can diminish the experience when they are not fulfilling the needs of the visitor. Carrying out a particular activity requires certain facilities. In Heumensoord, for example, the challenge for runners seems to diminish as the firing walls (see results chapter, Heumensoord section) are less accessible. In Karding, there is a lack of streetlight, and especially runners complain about the quality of the pavement of the paths. Zuid-Kennemerland misses maintenance on the horse paths and tailored routes for the different pedestrians. In Planken Wambuis the quality of some roads is bad, which makes some paths inaccessible for the different kinds of pedestrians. The lack of certain facilities makes it not possible to carry out the activity as the visitors want to, which keeps them from getting into a flow. Also, within a certain activity people can look for a very diverse range of experiences. Those experiences are based on the visitor needs, and the extent to which the area fulfils the different motives they are looking for. In other words, if the

area allows them to satisfy these various needs, the experience will be a satisfying one. This finding implies that it is quite difficult to give definitive and general recommendations for the way the nature areas should be arranged. On the one hand, the activities that people want to undertake can give some directions in the way a natural area could be 'designed'. Yet, on the other hand, the meaning of these activities (the motives of performing them, the needs specific needs and expectations people have) can vary for the same activity.

In terms of information sharing, in several cases visitors do not get the information they need. In the case of Planken Wambuis and Heumensoord, construction works were carried out causing a lot of frustration amongst particular visitors. The machines that perform the maintenance works are not only loud, but also destroyed some of the paths. Furthermore, the noisy machines gave visitors the feeling that they were more in a city park rather than in a natural area. As no information was provided on the maintenance activities (or the provided information was not seen by the visitors) people did not understand *why* the construction works were carried out. Although some information panels about these issues were present in the areas, they did not seem to reach the visitors who worried about these matters. On top of this, the visitors felt that they were not involved enough in the management of the area. This lack of involvement caused miscommunication, leading to misconceptions and unsatisfying visitor experiences. Especially in Zuid-Kennemerland, visitors do also not know where they have to go with suggestions, even though that information is also provided at the information panels at the entrances. From the interviews, some very helpful and easily applicable suggestions came forward, which could significantly enhance the experience of the visitors concerning the provision of information. However, these suggestions will not find their right 'landing place' as visitors are not involved enough in the management of the area.

Another site characteristic that has an impact on the visitor experience concerns the elements within the landscapes. These can both play negative as well as positive roles in the visitor experience. In general, in the eyes of the visitors there is nothing wrong with the visual component in the natural areas that were researched. The diversity of landscapes and its biodiversity triggers satisfying experiences. However, the case studies showed that the natural environment is not merely perceived by sight, but also by using all five senses. The trigger of the hearing did not always have a positive impact on the recreational experience. Sounds such as highways, other visitors, and maintenance works can keep people away from getting in a flow. It distracts the mind and stops them from focusing on nature. The senses of smell, taste and feel are less triggered during a visit in the properties of Natuurmonumenten. However, the visitors must be able to change place, to look rather than see, to experience the area rather than to endure it (Sverrisdóttir, 2011). The way in which the senses are prioritised to identify elements in the landscape, however, again is dependent on the goals, needs and capabilities of the visitor.

Furthermore, the route signing was also influencing the visitor experience, in most cases negatively as it appeared. During the observations, in all research cases there were visitors seen who were uncertain in which direction to follow. In some cases, even the start of some routes was difficult to find. All of this created moments of irritation among the visitors. Also, visitors were not provided with enough information about the route, which made it unclear for them what they could expect. In some cases this lack of route information was compensated for by the clear lay out of the park or by the presence of clear highly visible landmarks.

A last factor that potentially has an impact on the recreational visitor experience is the memories, which the visitors have of earlier visits to an area. The more people are using an area, or the more personal memories people have with an area, the more attached they get to it. Particularly in the case



of Heumensoord, many interviewees recreated already more than twenty years in the forest. The memories they have create a feeling that they partly own the woods. They often have a lot of knowledge about the natural and cultural history of the area. It appeared that people with this background, who get more attached to an area, create more responsibility for it. They worry about the changes that are made in the area. At the same time, they are the ones that more readily accept plans for changes in the area when explained and involved well.

#### **How can this knowledge be used? (SQ4)**

The outcomes of this study resulted in holistic knowledge about the different elements of activities and site characteristics in nature, which can influence the visitor's recreational experience. Activity is strongly linked with motivation. Even in undertaking specific activities in nature, visitors still can experience a broad range of different experiences. The individual experiences of the activity depend on the extent to which an area fulfils the specific needs. An understanding of the needs, which are *not* fulfilled in carrying out their activities, can be used to improve the park tailoring it even more to the needs of these visitors.

Knowledge on the way people use and interact with nature can be used to enhance visitors' experiences. Namely, for certain activities (mainly the active ones such as trail running and boot camping) and thus for 'fast' visitors, nature is used as a nice décor in which these activities can be carried out. The visitors' focus is mainly on the activity and on improving their skills, physical condition and so on. On the other hand, the 'slow' visitors, i.e. the ones who carry out more quiet activities such as walking and biking are open to enjoy nature and try to immerse in it. This knowledge could be useful in ways to approach and inform these different types of visitors creating expectations tailored to their activity and recreational patterns.

Concerning the site characteristics, knowledge was gained about the site characteristics that play an important role in enhancing the visitor experience. The knowledge about the characteristics that bring about irritation, negatively influencing the visitor experience, could be used to prevent visitors from getting annoyed.

#### **How to get the visitor in a flow?**

After answering the research sub-questions, now the main research question can be answered. The answer of the research question is built up out of a combination of the answers of the sub-questions discussed above. The research question is:

*How can Natuurmonumenten enhance the recreational visitor experience of the people who recreate at her properties?*

The most perfect visitor experience seems to be when people experience a state of flow. Yet the way in which this flow-state can be 'realised' is different for every visitor. Every individual appeared to look for a unique experience, which has to do with a unique combination of needs, wishes and requirements. As in most cases visitors' needs and wishes formed a complex and quite a broad palette, only some visitors seemed to have experienced the flow, experiencing a state of mind of being entirely absorbed by a natural place. Next to the fact that certain people did not reach this state of mind due to internal and external irritations, also there were quite some visitors that were simply not looking for giving the landscape free access through their senses. They (mainly the 'fast' visitors) were looking for a different pallet of experiences mainly being focused on their activities or their companions.

The main conclusion of the outcomes is that there are no clear generic patterns among the visitors in which Natuurmonumenten could segment their visitors, and with help of that segmentation, enhance the experience per segment. Certainly, smaller patterns were found such as coming into a flow or not, slow and fast visitors and the use of nature as décor and the focus on the task, the self or others. It is, however, hard to make generalised statements that would apply to all people visiting the properties of Natuurmonumenten. In other words, based on the findings of this research it can be said that it is not possible to divide the visitors unequivocal and conclusively into several *fixed* visitor categories or transparent segments. A categorisation that gives more space for interpretation looks particularly at experiences instead of divisions based on activities or companions, and allows visitors to move within the different segments, could be a more valuable model. The BSR-segmentation model (p.23) of SmartAgent (SmartAgent, 2010), for example, showed that the majority of the interviewed and observed visitors can be divided in their segments. This model, however, does not allow to work with visitors that one time seek for rest during the visit in nature, and the other time like to enjoy it in an active way, or with their company. Within each of the segments, there are still a lot of differences between the visitors that are part of these segments. Also, the wishes and needs within one segment differ and do not clearly come forward in the description of the segments. Thus, the BSR-model could work as a tool until a better one, that takes into account the above-described features, is developed. The sections below will further elaborate on this statement and makes further conclusions on what otherwise can be done to enhance the visitor's experience.

### **Useful models and concepts**

In the end, it now shows that enhancing the recreational visitor experience with the help of segmentation is possible, but the current BSR-model needs to be adapted, or a more suitable model should be developed. Next to the BSR-model, some specific other models and concepts appeared to be quite helpful in understanding characteristics of natural areas and dimensions of user experiences. The major characteristics of an estate that influence visitor experience, can be analysed using the preference matrix of the Kaplans (1998), paying attention to the area's coherence, complexity, legibility and mystery. Also, after an analysis with the BSR-model and a more in depth study of the specific needs of the visitors, the distinction between push and pull factors appears to be a useful one to describe the visitors' needs. Furthermore, paying attention to all the senses (and not only sight) can bring about new ideas for the way a natural area influences the concrete visitor experiences.

### **Getting to the flow**

Enhancing visitor experiences can be done by taking away the negative aspects of the visit and/or trigger positive experiences. Below, point one, two and three show negative influences on experiences that can be improved to enhance the aspects of an experience. Points four, five and six, are examples of things that could be improved further in order to stimulate positive affects. Given the unique palettes of expectations and needs of each visitor, the ambition to strive for states of flow for every visitor seems to be rather utopian.

1. By influencing prior expectations (for instance using p.r. –tools stressing the unique features of the area and informing what kind of nature activities this nature area is particularly suited for) people will be less disappointed when they visit the area, and so have less negative pressures on their experience once they are in the area. They know what they can expect and, therefore, do not face negative surprises.

## *2. Providing the right information at the right time*

People do not always get the information they are looking for at the place they are looking for it. When carefully examining what the visitor wants to know at which moments, irritation and confusion of finding the right route information and the right information about facilities can be reduced. In some cases, visitors expect to be informed about the construction works within the area, also expressing the expectation to be involved in the process of changes in the area and the daily management. It depends on the characteristics of the particular audience how this information needs to come to them. The case studies showed that it was not always very effective to put this kind of information about construction works next to the information panels at the entrances. This information is not relevant for the visitors at that moment. Information about constructions and maintenance can also come too late. Would the visitors have known in advance what was going on in the natural area, they could have decided to go somewhere else. It is advisable to get in touch with these (different groups of) visitors and brainstorm on optimal and timely ways to inform them.

## *3. Route signing*

Route signing must be consistent and clear from the beginning. Route signing is also partly related to expectation management since visitors want to know what they can expect along the route they are taking.

## *4. Function and rewards per activity*

There are different functions people are looking for in an area. When these functions are not fulfilled, they cannot carry out their activity without concerns, irritations and even disappointments. This keeps them from getting into a flow. The functions per activity are linked with the visitors' motivation. By taking away factors of the area that hinder the fulfilment of the needs of visitors, a potential enhancement of the visitor experience can be achieved. Although the general satisfaction with the Natuurmonumenten-properties seemed to be good, in many instances certain specific rewards that people sought were not met during their visit. In this context, an important criterion that differentiates the needs and expectations of the visitors appears to be on the one hand the intention to visit nature together with others, also meaning something for the others. Then, on the contrary, there are visitors who come to the area just for themselves and for fulfilling their needs and expectations. For example, when visitors gain rewards through and with others, it might be more relevant to set up a place where they can do things together with others. For more self-centred visitors who are mostly focussed on certain tasks or activities (such as in Karding), an area can be designed that can harbour these activities. For each area the balance between 'social' and 'self-focussed' visitors can be investigated, leading to priorities given to areas allowing for these kinds of activities.

## *5. Facilities*

In general, facilities can range from toilets, water taps to restaurants and from observation points to the maintenance and quality of the paths. Overall, visitors were satisfied with the existing facilities. However, by adding water taps, improving certain parts of the paths and maintaining certain features within the area (of course depending on the wishes of the visitor), it will show that small adaptations have a positive influence on the visitor experience. It will bring the visitor closer to getting into a flow.

## *6. Differentiation*

There is enough evidence of the fact that the people that live near the properties of Natuurmonumenten are also the most frequent visitors. However, these visitors are different per natural area and cannot all be approached in the same way. In this context, it is advisable to re-evaluate the Natuurmonumenten website. The information provided on the website about each area

was similar in tone of voice. Also, visually there does not seem to be too much difference per area, yet, different type of visitors identify with different kinds of images. The sort of images that are currently provided on the website do not seem to differentiate too much from each other per natural area.

How these points should be designed and implemented depends on the needs and wishes of the different audiences per property. As every research case showed, each of them has a different audience with different needs and desires, making it impossible to create concrete general guidelines on how to do this. In other words, the unique and specific properties of each area should be researched in a systematic way possibly using some of the analytical tools which appeared to be useful in this thesis (BSR-model, Kaplan Preference Matrix, push vs. pull, and the senses) and represented on the website in a way that matches the unique qualities of the area and the dominant wishes and expectations of the most important groups of visitors for that property. The only ones who can tell you how this should be done are the local visitors themselves. Involving visitors in researching and representing 'their' natural area could be a means to enhance feelings of responsibility and ownership.

### **Examining the needs and wishes**

Natuurmonumenten cannot enhance one's experience by meeting the wishes of individuals per activity. Namely, it was showed that within a particular activity, people still have very different needs and are looking for very different experiences. Also, there is a difference between the visitors of each of the properties. Therefore, it does not seem very realistic to formulate a general set of recipes for enhancing visitor experiences that applies to each property. The literature concerning experiences showed that the most common way of researching visitor experiences is by means of quantitative research (i.e. Manning, 2010; Manning & Anderson, 2012). In line with this observation in this thesis, qualitative methods were used since these allow to study the phenomenon of the recreational experience as a whole (Boeije, 2010). The methodological problem of this study was that it was difficult to access the individual's experience. Using a combination of different data gathering methods seems to be the best way forward. This explorative approach led to several significant findings that probably would not have come forward with the use of a more standardised quantitative approach. Even though it remains difficult to discuss the cognitions and feelings of people who have certain experiences, the qualitative methods allowed getting in touch with 'deeper' visitor's cognitions and affections and thus created the possibility to explore individual experiences more in-depth. Concepts such as motivations and triggering of the senses are matters that people are not often very conscious of. Furthermore, the landscape in which the interviews were held also enhanced a pleasurable atmosphere, at the same time enhancing a certain degree of relaxedness and openness of the interviewees. Also, the fact that the interviews were held at the same spot the interview was about, made it easier for participants to recall relevant experiences. For example, the muddy path we were standing on during an interview reminded the participant to tell a story about the accessibility of the area. This shows how the landscape itself became a kind of active participant in the research encounter.

It is advisable to embark on a diversified approach, looking at each case and each property as a unique situation with its own characteristics, visitor profiles and visitor experiences. In this, the BSR-model of SmartAgent (SmartAgent, 2010) and its lifestyle atlases (SmartAgent, 2012b, 2012c; The SmartAgent Company, 2011) could function as a general guideline that gives an indication of who is visiting a specific area. The observation that the majority of the visitors live close by the natural areas can be used to make predictions about the wishes of visitors, using the lifestyle segments of the people living nearby as an indicator.

After this, a closer examination of the area and its visitors must take place to discover the needs, wishes and expectations of the visitors in further depth. Observations allowed seeing the differences between what people say in an interview and what they actually do and show. In general it was experienced that much of the information that was shared during the interviews was also reflected in the observations. Observations, however, made a big contribution to understanding how the senses of visitors were triggered. Usually, this triggering happens rather unthinkingly with the consequence that individuals find it hard to describe exactly what triggered their experience. So given these positive experiences with these ways of undertaking the research, the foresters can carry out the research themselves by being 'amongst the visitors'. Combined with deskwork (i.e. about the BSR-segments of nearby inhabitants) a combination of observing of, and talking with the visitors will help to create a complete image of the visitors' needs and wishes. In this way, the foresters of Natuurmonumenten properties that have not participated in this study can carry out the research themselves. Even though the methods used for this study did not give the possibility to conduct the inquiry on a large scale, they are very low-budget and still deliver rich data and data tailored to the specifics of the local situation. It is important to keep in mind that this research can hardly be generalised for similar practices, here in the Netherlands nor in much different natural areas such as the National Parks in Africa or the mountains in Nepal. Due to the unique characteristics of each these natural areas, it cannot be assumed that these outcomes have the same meaning at other natural areas inside and outside of the Netherlands.

The following section recommends on which research is necessary to further investigate the recreational visitor experience in nature. This is followed by a section with practical recommendations for Natuurmonumenten.

## 5.2 Recommendations for future research

Based on the knowledge that was gained from this study, there are two subjects that could be very interesting and relevant to research further. Firstly, at the beginning of this thesis I suggested that profound experiences of nature would create feelings leading to commitment to nature and the natural area, resulting in more donations (see assumptions illustrated in figure 5.1). However, after this study it turned out that a separate study is necessary to investigate if a flow experience or enhancing one's experience is indeed correlated to the donation behaviour of the visitor. This study has looked at the current experiences of visitors and how they could be improved. I also recommend to further research the effects of attempts to improve the visitor experience on donation behaviour. The second domain of future research concerns the translation from lifestyles to concrete measures. This research has shown that in each area, dominant groups of visitors can be discerned. Now it is a matter of more focussed research on the specific measures that can be taken to accommodate to the needs and expectations emerging from specific lifestyles and the even more specific wishes and needs of these dominant groups. What kind of expectations and needs do people with specific lifestyles have and which measures can be undertaken to adapt to these needs and expectations in a tailor-made fashion? Possibly this kind of research could result in a further refinement of segmentation criteria.

Next to these two points of inquiry, other noteworthy and relevant points of future research can be recommended. Even though the four studies together provided a good representation of the diversity of experiences of the visitors, it might be valuable to research areas that differ a lot from each other in the natural setting. Now they were chosen based on segmentation by lifestyle. For a future study, a coastal area, a forest area and a hilly natural area could be selected to do comparable explorative



research in natural areas that differ a lot from each other in terms of site characteristics. This might bring additional insights on the impact of the surroundings on the recreational experience. Furthermore, it was noticed that the branding of Natuurmonumenten in the researched natural areas was not always (well) recognised by the visitors. Some of the visitors even stated the name of the 'competitor', namely Staatsbosbeheer. Therefore it might be useful to do research to what extent people make a connection with Natuurmonumenten during their experience in one of the associations' properties, and whether enhancing their experience will cause a better connection with the association in the form of an increase in donors and memberships.

Other subjects that relate to the topic of the visitor experience that deserve further exploration are amongst other carrying capacity, personal memory and information provision. For the foresters of the Natuurmonumenten properties, it is useful to research how the enhancement of the visitor experience could be used to find a balance between nature recreation and protection. The Management matrices of Manning and Anderson (2012, pp.49-55) can be a useful starting point to approach this topic. Another subject that should be explored in further depth is the role of personal memories in visitor experience. This study showed that personal memories have a great value in the responsibility people take in terms of conservation of the nature area. Further research into this topic could generate more knowledge on why this is and how it can be used in order to enhance the visitor experience and feelings of 'ownership' of and commitment to the specific natural area. A final topic that can be explored more in depth could be the information provision. A better understanding of the kind of information visitors are looking for, when they want it and how it best can be communicated, allows for an information strategy more tailored to the needs of the visitors. A good starting point for researching this topic is considering the literature of Bell (2008), who gives many description on ways to provide visitors who enjoy outdoor recreation with the right information.

It is furthermore necessary to do supplementary research on the theories and methods that discuss experiences. Namely, after I had examined the relevant literature for this study, I saw that there was a considerable disagreement in the literature on the question how experiences ideally could be researched. Both qualitative and quantitative studies have occurred in the literature search, but I concluded that not one of them seemed to create a holistic view of the visitor experience. Also, several authors such as Jennings (2010) and (Gelter, 2011) discuss ways to utilise the quality of holistic experiences and argue that no integrated framework has yet been developed for the analysis of the personal experience. Therefore, methods and theories looking at the visitor experience need to be improved. It is necessary to look further to research methods that can give a more holistic image of experiences. Theory needs to be further adapted and refined to be able to make experiences more measurable. Also, more studies are needed to delve into deeper levels of how positive and negative experiences vary for different types of visitors. This allows for answering the needs of the visitors even more precise.

### **5.3 Practical recommendations for Natuurmonumenten**

This section provides recommendations for Natuurmonumenten to 1) advice on investments that could be made to enhance the experiences of the visitors of the research cases and 2) give an indication what general actions could be taken to strengthen the experience on other properties of Natuurmonumenten. Also, the use of segmentation based on lifestyle will be reviewed.

### Case study specific recommendations

The use of a multiple case-research allowed to compare the research outcomes of the cases and to discover similarities and differences between them. A similarity of all research cases is that the majority of the visitors live within a 30-minute travel distance of the natural area. People from further away are more often attracted by the special (natural) features of the area than the people who live close to the natural area. Each of the case studies showed to have a different audience. In this section, the recommendations per case study will be discussed, starting with Zuid-Kennemerland.

#### **Zuid-Kennemerland**

It was concluded that people (especially first-time visitors) quickly get lost due to the map at the entrance. To solve this problem, the advice is to make the landmarks of the area more visible. Zuid-Kennemerland certainly has some landmarks, take for example the path with the fallen trees, the water tap and the open space with the picnic table. They can serve as orienting signs and way-finding information. These should also be clearly indicated on the map at the Duin- en Kruidberg entrance, including a little map of the area that visitors can take with them. Bell (2008) gives very exquisite descriptions on how to do this. This investment would be worth the effort as it prevents visitors from becoming frustrated. Something that would satisfy the needs of the visitors even more is to create tailored routes with elements the different visitors want to see and do.

#### **Planken Wambuis**

For Planken Wambuis it is advised to invest in a better division between the pedestrians and the mountain bikers. This came forward as irritation point number one amongst the pedestrians. The noisy mountain bikers impair the pedestrians from completing their goals, which is most often to relax and to enjoy the peace and serenity of the area. For this problem it was often suggested to separate user paths. This is however already the case within the biggest part of the areas. Therefore it is advised to make the mountain biker less visible e.g. by the use of zoning, where every user has its 'own' part of the area. However, considering the time and money this investment would take, the other option would be a more logical choice.

In order to increase the recognisability of the association, Natuurmonumenten could benefit from unified signing within Planken Wambuis. Furthermore, the implementation of several landmarks could help first time visitors to have a better orientation. The Kaplans (1998) provide clear information about the use of landmarks. To name a point where one should think of, landmarks are only useful if they are present in a considerable amount. Too many of them takes away their function.

#### **Heumensoord**

In the previous chapter, it was discussed that Heumensoord misses a kind of mystery because of its structured paths. It is also very important to have such element in the area as it encourages people to further explore the areas. The focus of attention is now mostly on the task and on others, while mystery can also create moments of attention to the scene. The Kaplans (1998) name several suggestions to improve the mystery in an area. A winding path is the hallmark of mystery in an area; it makes visitors to find out what is round the bend. A narrow street or big tree also suggests that there is other information ahead, without giving away anything. Mystery is also brought about by fog as well as by the interplay between light and shadow. The Kaplans also argue that mystery encourages people to further explore the scenes, which brings the focus of the visitors even more on the nature rather than on the activity or the other.

Furthermore, it was found out that visitors do not know that Natuurmonumenten is currently managing and maintaining Heumensoord. This may also explain the low Natuurmonumenten

membership among visitors. This is an opportunity for Natuurmonumenten to gain more members and it is therefore advised to pay more attention to branding in Heumensoord.

The experience of the visitors who recreate in Heumensoord for many years already, could be improved by two things. Firstly, there must be more challenging routes that fit their needs. Secondly, the historical elements in the area must come forward more explicit. According to Bell (2008), historical sites help 'to connect people with past human use or associations, and also demonstrate the capacity of nature to reabsorb our efforts' (p.108). There is, however, no demand for historical information at the site as this group has not the focus on learning something new.

### **Kardinge**

Kardinge is mostly valued because of its close location to the city of Groningen. The area attracts a lot of different kinds of people and therefore visitors also have different expectations. It is advised to increase the biodiversity of the area since that was requested across the different kind of visitors. Also the Kardinge hill is valued a lot among all the different kinds of visitors, and it would, therefore, be interesting to explore the possibilities further with this attractive aspect of Kardinge. If there is the possibility to diversify the offer within the area, I advise creating more streetlights for the 'fast' visitors. In this way, they can also carry out their trainings in the evening without bothering other guests. For the slow visitors it is important to keep the areas where they can relax and walk their dog. The creation of an area where dogs can walk unleashed will be appreciated.

Many visitors were involved in the design of Kardinge when the area was created. Even though Kardinge now exists for several years, the area is still young and in a stage of development. Many repeat visitors also know that the area is still changing and also respect that. In order to be up to date with the changes and the future of the area, they would also like to be involved in the daily management of the area. I would therefore recommend to not only consult the visitors at the begin stage but involve them in every step along the way.

### **General recommendations**

This section provides recommendations across the case studies.

#### **Rate your experience**

As discussed in the trends section in the theoretical framework, nowadays people attach more value to the (online) ratings of others. The ratings play a role in deciding which area to visit and it shapes their expectations. As presented in the results, people want to know what they can expect, whether the areas and/or routes are suitable for them or not. Even though the Natuurmonumenten website provides the opportunity to rate routes and comment on them, it is hardly done. It is therefore advised to promote this possibility more and also stimulate people to rate the routes. The ratings will create expectations, with the consequence that people know what to expect when visiting an area for the first time, and to prevent them from possible disappointments. The website could also offer a tool to find recreational activities that fit the user segments or the aspired functions which the visitors expect. For instance, a certain variety of functions is specified (i.e. 'intense sporting', 'enjoying the quietness and peace', 'meeting wild animals', 'learning about the landscape') and when the visitor selects one of these functions the website comes up with suggestions for where to go in the area.

#### **Crowding**

As in many of the research areas, crowding was experienced and zoning does not always appear as an applicable solution. To spread the crowds it is advisable to provide more information about the routes that are already there. This especially applies to the areas that also contain unpaved paths such as in

Zuid-Kennemerland and Planken-Wambuis. Provide routes with information about how challenging it is, the highlights one can see along the roads, and for example the suitability for strollers, or a nice trail for children. In this way people with strollers will not automatically choose for the paved paths, and families could go to the places that are attractive for children. Crowds will spread and next to that, people know what to expect, will be less disappointed, and choose something that meets the function they look for in the area. See the section below (trails) for advice on how this can be done.

It is not advised to create areas that are interesting for only one particular activity group, such as 'mountainbike areas'. Namely, in every research area it was the case that the primary motivation of people to come to that specific area was because it was nearby their homes. Especially the entrepreneurial purple lifestyle group has less time to recreate outdoors and therefore wants to do something nearby. They are one of the groups that participate in more extreme sports such as mountain biking. The biggest part of them will not travel long distances for a suitable mountain bike park.

### **Hiking trails**

The majority of the Natuurmonumenten trails are meant for pedestrians. As can be noted from the results and the conclusion, even within the activity of walking, people seek for different experiences. For that reason, it is advised to make differentiations within the walking trails to offer those different experiences. Furthermore, many of the hiking trails *seem* suitable and well constructed, but in practice this often is not the case. Try to find first time visitors who walk the routes for the first time, and observe what kind of obstacles they face and ask what they are missing. This allows you to see where it is necessary to put extra direction signs and add or remove facilities. Furthermore, it was seen that pedestrians have a range of very different needs compared to for instance the athletes. Try to create, or at least indicate, which routes are suitable for whom. Bell (2008, p.105) for example, suggests to look at the following sub-division:

1. General exercise and relaxation by anyone, with an emphasis on multi-accessibility
2. Scenic viewing leading to a viewpoint
3. Wildlife viewing
4. Visiting archaeological sites or other cultural features
5. Education visits to explore geology and geography, nature land cultural history
6. Physical demanding routes for serious exercise.

The first option is especially attractive for areas that are visited by cosy lime and exuberantly yellow segments. They are easy to walk for buggies as well as wheelchairs. Point two, four and five would be specifically interesting for the modest aqua lifestyle group since they are eager to learn and like to experience the local, the authentic. Option three and six would be attractive for the entrepreneurial purple lifestyle group. They enjoy something unexpected, surprising and something new, which an exciting wildlife viewing trail allows for. Also, this group is very much interested in all kinds of sports. However, it is necessary to keep in mind that the needs and preferences of, for example, the cosy lime group are different from every particular area. Observations and talks with the local visitors are therefore necessary to tailor the path to their wishes.

Providing route information for each of the different routes can be very easy, for instance, by the use of symbols with indicators like barrier-free, easy, moderate and strenuous. Or for example with a small summit trail that describes the length, inclination, cross slope average, trail with, surface and obstacle (for example see figure 5.2)

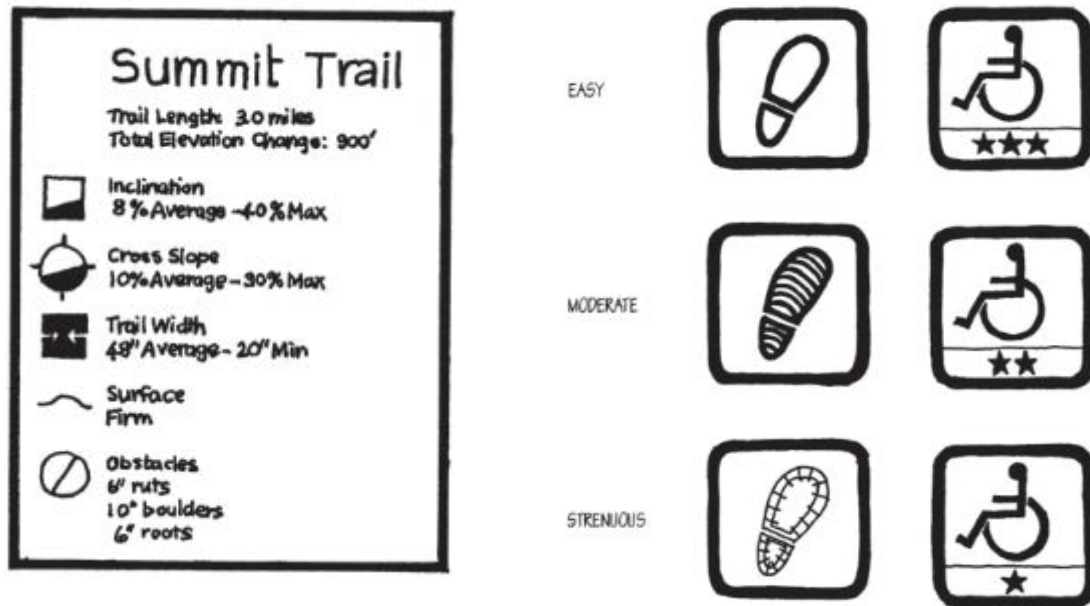


Figure 5.2 Describing trails (Bell, 2008, p.111)

### Involve them

One of the keys for improving the visitor experience in nature is to allow the participants to develop their own narratives and draw upon their own imaginative potential rather than providing ready-made storylines for them. The visitor needs to be seen as a co-producer. This could require more creativity from the foresters than just organise walks in the forest and bird watching excursions. When one wants to look further in management in the form of co-production, it is advised to look into the topic of 'creative tourism'. One of the main authors in this field is Greg Richards (i.e. Richards & Wilson, 2007a; 2007b). In this perspective, the visitors must not merely be seen as 'consumers of nature' but rather must be stimulated in the process of self-development. For that reason, it is advised that Natuurmonumenten starts to co-operate even more with their visitors. Not only at the moments when big parts of the area need to be changed, or when new paths need to be created. But by continuously involving them with the developments and maintenance of the areas. In this way, people will understand why Natuurmonumenten does the things she does and also support her decisions. They learn more about the management, which will transform them. After all, a part of the visitors of the Natuurmonumenten properties are the members of the *association*. Members have a saying in the company. How can you please them more than by involving them more?

### Segmentation based on lifestyle

The conclusion showed that as the needs, wishes and expectations of the visitors are so divers, it is hardly possible to divide them in a couple of broad segments. It is therefore advised to keep in mind that it is not promising to create an area that 'everyone' likes. Recreationists are simply too diverse, not everyone can enjoy the same natural area. Next to that, people also want different things; one moment they want peace and serenity and the other moment they want to catch up or work on their health. The BSR-model of SmartAgent (SmartAgent, 2010) can be used as a tool to give an *indication* of the kind of visitors come to certain areas. However, with several relatively easy research instruments that can be used by the foresters themselves, they cannot only at one moment but regularly keep track of the profile of his/her own visitors. Namely, by observing and interviewing (using the topics discussed above and in the interview guide) a holistic representation of the needs, wishes, expectations, and also irritations of the visitors of a specific area, can be gained. Of course, following on that, an action plan needs to be set up in case foresters come to the conclusion that some changes are necessary. Once undertaking certain changes it is also important to pay attention

to questions like: what does this change mean for the content of the website, social media, features of the park, information provision, etc.? Cross-telling of customer stories may be a good and relatively easy beginning to start with, as visitors nowadays value experiences of others. Keep in mind to look at what can eliminate the dissatisfaction of the visitors, and what could increase their satisfaction. They may be triggered by internal processes of focus and skill development, are looking for awards, or are attracted by external events.

## **Methods**

In case Natuurmonumenten is interested to do similar research in other properties of the association, it is recommended to invest in a combination of two methods. First, foresters should invest more in so-called 'klapstoelbeheer' (tip-up seat management) since it is very low-cost and at the same time a lot of information can be collected. Next to that, interviews with frequent visitors will bring enough information on the small issues and irritations. A combination of both will provide the foresters with sufficient information to get familiar with their visitors and to detect possible problems.

As we could see in Heumensoord, it does not mean that every 'type' of visitor needs its own facility. For example, the firing walls in Heumensoord are valued by the hikers, runners, and Nordic walkers. Therefore keep in mind that changing experiences does not always mean drastic measures.

## **Developments in visitor experiences**

Until now, the outcomes based on the research results have been translated into recommendations. However, another point of attention concerning this topic that cannot remain unmentioned, are the current developments in outdoor recreation. Current developments, or trends, were not primarily part of the empirical research, however, it is too optimistic to assume that having worked on the points of improvement mentioned above will once and for all guarantee a continuous long-term visitor experience. For instance, demographic trends can be of influence in the increase or decrease in the size of particular audiences (i.e. the increasing presence of elderly visitors). Also, the way we select where we want to recreate, and what we want to do, can be influenced by future developments. Thus, it seems to be important for Natuurmonumenten to keep examining current trends as it can help to understand the influential forces and their effect on outdoor recreation and the recreational visitor experience (Gartner & Lime, 2000). This 'trend-knowledge' is potentially useful for the association to predict future changes in visitors' aspirations, needs and expectations. Currently, there are several trends that can have possible impacts on the recreational visitor experience in the future:

### **Trend 1: Changing demographical structure**

An important characteristic of the European population is the increasing average age (Boksberger & Laesser, 2009). This is also an issue in the Netherlands because over the years the proportion of younger people is declining, while that of older, retired people, is expanding. The share of 65+ in the total population in the Netherlands was 12,8% in 1990. Over the years this percentage went up to 15,6% in 2011 (Arts & Otten, 2013). Bell, et al. (2008) argue that this 'senior population' has more time and money, but is also less fit and has needs for special requirements during outdoor recreation. Their wishes range from easier, smoother paths to shorter routes and more seats. Another change in the demographical structure in the Netherlands is the growth in the number of one-parent families. In 2013, more than 14 percent of the under aged children living at home were part of a single-parent family, while in 2003 this was 12 percent (Korvorst, Garssen, & Harmsen, 2013). The growth of single-parent families has implications for outdoor recreation (González & Bello, 2002). As Nickerson and Black (2000) argue, 'single-parent families may find it more difficult to take time to enjoy the out-of-doors



regularly' (p.35). In addition, since many one-adult households have lower income levels, their ability to travel to national parks and wilderness areas could be limited. They prefer to visit places near to where they live, and which are free or cheap to visit. Also, some parents only have access to their children at weekends or during holidays. They want to make the most of these times by visiting extra special places, looking for extraordinary experiences (Bell, 2008).

### **Trend 2: Technology**

It is difficult to imagine this world without mobile phones and computers. People nowadays embrace the technological developments at large scale and have faith in the progress of technology (de Bruijn et al., 2013). Almost everyone in the Netherlands has access to the Internet nowadays. The use of mobile devices is strongly increasing while desktops already start to lose their popularity (de Bruijn et al., 2013). As people are connected 24 hours a day, seven days per week, they are able to plan their activities at the last minute. 'People therefore expect things to be available and places to be open at the last minute and all the time' (Bell, 2008, p.13)

Furthermore, technological developments allow us to decide when and where we work. It also offers people to profile themselves in a certain way amongst others via social media. Relating this to outdoor recreation, it could be possible that the number of visits of natural recreational areas will decline (Manning, 2011). This decline is correlated with measures of rising participation in electronic entertainment media, including television, movies, video games, and Internet use. These findings have led to the hypothesis that American culture, particularly amongst young people, is shifting away from nature-based recreation to the more sedentary interests (Manning, 2011). This may have profound implications for the future of outdoor recreation and even environmental protection.

Combined with the development of internet access, the development of GPS-systems in mobile phones causes the number of recreation routes that are available online to increase rapidly. There was a large turnout in routes with GPS, themed routes and story routes in 2013. Currently, there are more than 2,5 million free to download routes for walking and biking as well as for horseback riding, and rollerblading in the Netherlands (de Bruijn et al., 2013). Also, more and more people start using GPS so that people can share their routes afterward and people can comment on them (story-telling) or use them for own recreation (de Bruijn et al., 2013). In this development, the digital sharing of information becomes more important. People value opinions and stories of others and let them play a major role in their decisions making process (Buhalis, 2000). For example, the e-bike still gains popularity in the Netherlands. More than 60 percent of the Dutch inhabitants older than 50 years who do not own an electrical bike are planning to buy one in the near future (de Bruijn et al., 2013). When buying an e-bike, individuals attach a lot of value to the reviews on the Internet. Technological developments also allowed for very luxury e-bikes. For instance, the company Dutch Pedelec Tours offers tourists e-bikes with Wi-Fi so that tourists can download touristic apps. A digital guide installed on the e-bike provides the tourists with background information about the area and possible routes and facilities (Dutch Pedelec Tours, 2015). Funny enough the built-in GPS tracker also allows the organisation to track down lost tourists.

### **Trend 3: (Free?) time**

Due to the globalisation of our economies and increased international competition the society is speeding up. This trend demands people to work more hours per week, leading to a shifting border where the line between work and family blurs (Nickerson & Black, 2000; Pigram, 2003a). Less work is done in classic economic sectors such as agriculture, with the consequence that people tend to lose the sense of connection with nature and become more stressed (Nickerson & Black, 2000). The increased speed of this time changes both our behaviour and consumption patterns. As Varley & Semple (2015) argue that 'little time is available for individuals to anchor themselves ontologically

with places, narratives and histories which confer meaning' (p.76). 'Free time, therefore, often becomes an imagined opportunity for a reconnection with romanticised notions of rich, meaningful experiences' (p.76). A study from the ANWB (2013) showed that as a reaction to the everyday busyness and constant stream of all kinds of information, people are looking for possibilities to escape from daily rush, for instance, by a visit to a forest. Contradicting with the trend of technology, the consequence of this trend would be that people still want to go into natural areas; even more often than before. For natural areas to be attractive, this 'escapist' wish should be accommodated. Henderson & Vikander (2007) argue that the need to get away from the daily busyness will imply an increase in the demand for nature. However, one will not go into nature just to visit it but always with a reason, for example, to collect natural objects, collect names of places that have been visited or to learn more about nature. More in general, De Bruijn et al. (2013) state that meaning of the activities will become more important. It also can be expected that people will be looking for small-scale activities that only take a limited amount of time. Next to that, in some cases the recreational area could be an easily approachable extension of the living room or the office, where people can picnic with their friends or work with the laptop on their lap.

As a reaction to the improving technologies and materiality of our society currently a new global 'counter-trend' is emerging where people have increasing needs for a sustainable environment (de Bruijn et al., 2013). Especially at the local level there is more demand for sustainable initiatives and products. Instead of throwing something away or recycle it, we can replant our products and let them grow again. Although, these so-called 'new-life-inside' products do not solve the environmental problems, but have a strong symbolic function. As a reaction to the speeding up of society, and becoming more mobile, slow experiences and a slow movement is demanded, 'dedicated to promoting an alternative to the ever increasing faster urban conditions' (Henderson & Vikander, 2007, p.41). Urban stressed out people desire to slow down, resisting to the ever-accelerating pattern of lifestyle in search of opportunities to vent their stress (Gelter, 2009; Oh, et al., 2014). There is a limited amount of literature available concerning the slow movement in outdoor recreation experiences. Much research has been done in 'slow tourism' (i.e. Fullagar, Markwell, & Wilson, 2012), which outcomes can be applicable for developing new notions of visiting natural destinations.

#### **Trend 4: Wellbeing goes before prosperity**

Another important consumer trend that has an impact on outdoor recreation and the recreational experience, is that the Dutch attach less and less value to prosperity and rather value their own personal wellbeing (Boksberger & Laesser, 2009; de Bruijn et al., 2013; Hallab, 2006). Wellbeing can be defined in terms of health and happiness. Within this trend, the material possession of products and goods becomes less important. The trend is reinforced by the current financial crisis where people have less to spend, and also start to save money for worse times. On the other hand, this trend also creates flexibility. For instance, not buying an expensive caravan allows people to vary in the ways they spend their holidays. One year they can choose to rent an equipped mobile home and the next year they can go to a hotel or undertake a round trip using B&B's. More and more 'staycations' come into fashion, where people just stay at home during their holiday, and explore their own region. This trend can influence the experience of the visitor significantly as people look for different experiences in the same environment. The number of people present in an area next to cities and housing areas can increase because more people stay at home. This may result in crowding, with dissatisfying experiences as a consequence.

#### **Trend 5: The authentic local**

One of the many implications of worldwide competition in the field of tourism and leisure is that the diversity of tourism and leisure products and places tend to decrease. Recreational experiences concerning localised cultures and characteristics get less and less attention. As a reaction to this

homogenising development, people are starting to look for individualised and tailored recreation experiences (Jennings, 2010). According to Bell, et al. (2009) that is why there is a strong desire among recreationists to experience places with a strong local or regional character and authenticity. People want to communicate with the locals and learn from them, rather than visit the trampled paths. They are looking for places that present unique features, such as the unique natural or cultural identity, aspiring an 'authentic experience'. According to de Bruijn et al. (2013), it is, therefore, worth investing in the Natura-2000 network. As the quality of the ecological network improves, the areas become more attractive to visitors. In their turn these areas can become a motor for the local economies because they attract a lot of people. The technology trend as discussed above also influences the ways in which people meet with the locals. Through so-called 'social travelling' people share their experiences on Facebook, and rate the experiences of others. Also, the NBTC-NIPO Research (2013) showed that almost 40 percent of their respondents made use of rating sites for holiday and recreation. 87 percent take reviews of other people into consideration for deciding whether to visit or not.

It is important to stay critical to the developments in outdoor recreation as well as global developments. For instance, several publications on developments in recreation pay attention to the increasing role of technology (see for example Bell, 2008, p.13; Buhalis, 2000; de Bruijn et al., 2013). Yet, with regard to recreational activities in nature, this research showed that this trend does not seem to hold. When recreating in nature people do not appear to have this increasing need for using mechanical or electronic devices. Visiting nature is done with the intention to allow the nature do the stimulating and enriching, rather than technological devices.

### Final remarks

Obviously the implementation of matters to enhance experiences in the Natuurmonumenten properties is more difficult than to plan and organise the traditional marketing strategies. Experiences cannot easily be calculated, measured, or planned. Also, creating successful experiences is a process that is constantly changing. Therefore, the interaction with the visitors of the Natuurmonumenten properties should never stop, allowing the association to continuously adapt to new wishes and needs with regard to property management and maintenance. I hope to have argued the great importance of acknowledging and embracing the holistic qualities of experiences in nature. Hopefully, one now can understand that a superficial walk in nature is not enough to obtain the profound experience of connectedness to nature.

## 6. References

- Abels, P. (2014). *Planken Wambuis Wild en bijster land*. Nederland: AFdH Uitgevers.
- Afdeling Natuur en Landschap. (2012). *Handboek Beheercyclus*. 's-Graveland: Natuurmonumenten.
- ANWB. (2013). Moment van geluk in bos- en recreatiegebied. Retrieved January 27, 2015, from <http://www.anwb.nl/vrije-tijd/nieuws/2013/maart/moment-van-geluk-in-bos--en-recreatiegebied>.
- Ardoer campings. (2015). Natuurmonumenten Zwerfhut. Retrieved January 14, 2015, from <http://www.ardoer.com/nl/camping/wije-werelt/verhuur/veluwe-zwerfhut>.
- Arts, K., & Otten, F. (2013). Beroepsbevolking in twee decennia ruim 5 jaar ouder. Retrieved October 1, 2014, from <http://www.cbs.nl/nl-NL/menu/themas/dossiers/vergrijzing/publicaties/artikelen/archief/2013/2013-3810-wm.htm.2>
- Batty, R. (2003). Market segmentation. In J. M. Jenkins & J. J. Pigram (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Leisure and Outdoor Recreation* (pp. 295–296). London: Routledge.
- Becker, Howard, S., & Blanche, G. (1957). Participant observation and interviewing: A comparison. *Human Organization*, 16(3), 28–32.
- Beh, A., & Bruyere, B. L. (2007). Segmentation by visitor motivation in three Kenyan national reserves. *Tourism Management*, 28(6), 1464–1471.
- Bell, S. (2008). *Design for Outdoor Recreation* (2nd ed.). New York: Taylor & Francis.
- Bell, S., Simpson, M., Tyrväinen, L., Sievänen, T., & Pröbstl, U. (Eds.). (2009). *European Forest Recreation and Tourism, a Handbook*. London, New York: Taylor & Francis.
- Bell, S., Tyrväinen, L., Sievänen, T., Pröbstl, U., & Simpson, M. (2007). Outdoor Recreation and Nature Tourism: A European Perspective. *Living Reviews in Landscape Research*, 1(2), 1–37.
- Bergman, L., & Shroder, L. (1999). *Genieten van de natuur, Recreatie bij Natuurmonumenten*. 's-Graveland: Vereniging Natuurmonumenten.
- Best, S. (2010). *Leisure Studies Themes and Perspectives*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Bieger, T., & Leasser, C. (2002). Market segmentation by motivation: the case of Switzerland. *Travel Research*, 41(1), 68–76.
- Bijlsma, R., Boersma, J., & Rotstein, J. (2002). *Ontwikkelingsplan Karding Eindrapport*. Groningen: Grontmij.
- Bingé, E., Gnoth, J., & Andreu, L. (2008). Advanced Topics in Tourism Market Segmentation. In A. Woodside & D. Martin (Eds.), *Tourism management: Analysis, Behaviour and Strategy* (pp. 151–173). Oxfordshire: CABI.
- Blizard, C. R., & Schuster, R. M. (2007). Fostering Children's Connections to Natural Places through Cultural and Natural History Storytelling. *Children, Youth and Environments*, 17(4), 172–206.
- Boeije, H. (2010). *Analysis in Qualitative Research*. Los Angeles, London, New Dheli, Singapore, Washington DC: SAGE Publications.
- Boksberger, P. E., & Laesser, C. (2009). Segmentation of the senior travel market by the means of travel motivations. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 15(4), 311–322.
- Brekers, R. (2014). *Beheer- en ontwikkelplan Nationaal Park Zuid-Kennemerland 2014-2014*. Delfgauw: Overlegorgaan Nationaal Park Zuid-Kennemerland.
- Brown, P. (2003). Recreation Opportunity Spectrum. In J. M. Jenkins & J. J. Pigram (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Leisure and Outdoor Recreation* (pp. 418–420). London: Routledge.
- Buhalis, D. (2000). Trends in information Technology and Tourism. In W. C. Gartner & D. W. Lime (Eds.), *Trends in Outdoor Recreation, Leisure and Tourism* (pp. 47–61). New York: CABI Publishing.
- Buijs, A. (2009). *Public Natures: Social representations of nature and local practices*. Wageningen University, Wageningen.
- Buijs, A. E., & de Vries, S. (2005). *Verschillen in landschapsbeleving tussen bevolkingsgroepen: literatuurstudie en opzet voor empirisch onderzoek* (Planbureaurapporten No. 25). Wageningen: Natuurplanbureau.
- Buijs, A. E., Pedroli, B., & Luginbül, Y. (2006). From hiking through farmland to farming in a leisure landscape: changing social perceptions of the European landscape. *Landscape Ecology*, 21, 375–389.
- CBS - Bevolkingsstatistiek. (2013). Bevolking [personen], 2013 - Streekplangebieden (NH). Retrieved January 26, 2015, from <http://noordholland.databank.nl>.
- CBS - Huishoudensstatistiek. (2013). Huishoudens [huishoudens], 2013 - Streekplangebieden (NH). Retrieved January 26, 2015, from <http://noordholland.databank.nl>.
- Coesèl, M., Schaminée, J., & van Duuren, L. (2007). *De natuur als bondgenoot De wereld van Heimans en Thijss in historisch perspectief*. Zeist: KNNV Uitgeverij.
- Cohen, S. (2010). Searching for Escape, Authenticity and Identity: Experiences of "Lifestyle Travellers." In M. Morgan, P. Lugosi, & J. R. B. Ritchie (Eds.), *The Tourism and Leisure Experience: Consumer and Managerial Perspectives* (pp. 27–42). Bristol, Buffalo, Toronto: Channel View Publications.
- Cordell, H. K. (2008). The latest on trends in nature-based outdoor recreation. *Forest History Today, Spring*, 4–10.
- Crompton, J. L. (1983). Selecting target markets - A key to effective marketing. *Journal of Park and Recreation*, 7(26), 7–26.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1975). *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety*. San Francisco: Ossey-Bass.

- Cutler, S. Q., & Carmichael, B. A. (2010). The Dimensions of the Tourist Experience. In M. Morgan, P. Lugosi, & B. Ritchie (Eds.), *The Tourism and Leisure Experience: Consumer and Managerial Perspectives* (pp. 3–26). Bristol: Channel View Publications.
- Dann, G. M. S. (1981). Tourist motivation: An appraisal. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 8(2), 187–219.
- De Bruijn, K., Vermeulen, T., Korteweg Maris, D., Rooijakkers, M., Oskam, J., van Rosendaal, R., ... van der Noort, U. (2013). *Trendrapport toerisme, recreatie en vrije tijd 2013* (No. 32). Nieuwegein: NRIT media, NBTC, NHTV internationaal hoger onderwijs Breda.
- De Bruijn, K., Vermeulen, T., Korteweg Maris, D., Rooijakkers, M., van der Most, K., van der Meulen, J., ... van der Noort, U. (2012). *Trendrapport toerisme, recreatie en vrije tijd 2012* (No. 31). Nieuwegein: NRIT media, NBTC, NHTV internationaal hoger onderwijs Breda. Retrieved from Bieb NM.
- De Vries, S. (2009). *Beleving & recreatief gebruik van natuur en landschap: Naar een robuuste en breed gedragen set van indicatoren voor de maatschappelijke waardering van natuur en landschap* (WOT-rapport No. 100). Wageningen.
- De Wekker, E. (2012). *Natuur- en Recreatiegebied Karding: Een adviesrapport voor de inrichting van de groene strook gelegen aan de zuidelijke rand van de wijk Beijum*. Groningen: Natuurmonumenten.
- Dolnicar, S. (2008). Market segmentation in tourism. In A. G. Woodside & D. Martin (Eds.), *Tourism management: Analysis, Behaviour and Strategy* (pp. 129–150). Cambridge: CAB International.
- Driver, B. (2003). Experiences. In J. M. Jenkins & J. J. Pigram (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Leisure and Outdoor Recreation* (pp. 168–171). London: Routledge.
- Dutch Pedelec Tours. (2015). The Dutch Pedelec Tours - The e-bike experience of the Netherlands. Retrieved January 28, 2015, from <http://www.dutchpedelectours.com/>.
- Ewert, A. (1994). Playing the edge: motivation and risk taking in a high altitude wildernesslike environment. *Environment and Behaviour*, 26(1), 3–14.
- Formica, S., & Uysal, M. (2001). Segmentation of Travelers Based on Environmental Attitudes. *Journal of Hospitality & Leisure Marketing*, 9(3-4), 35–49.
- Fullagar, S., Markwell, K., & Wilson, E. (Eds.). (2012). *Slow Tourism: Experiences and Mobilities*. Bristol, New York, Ontario: Channel View Publications.
- Gartner, W. C., & Lime, D. W. (Eds.). (2000). *Trends in Outdoor Recreation, Leisure and Tourism*. New York: CABI.
- Gelter, H. (2000). Friluftsliv: The Scandinavian philosophy of outdoor life. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 5(1), 77–92.
- Gelter, H. (2009). Friluftslive as slow and peak experiences in the transmodern society. Presented at the 150-Year International Dialogue Conference Celebration Henrik Ibsen: The birth of “Friluftslive,” Norway.
- Gelter, H. (2011). Polar Tourist Experiences: Challenges and Possibilities for Transmodern Tourism. In A. A. Grenier & D. K. Müller (Eds.), *Polar Tourism: A Tool for Regional Development* (pp. 227–250). Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec.
- Gerring, J. (2007). *Case study research: Principles and practices*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- González, A. M., & Bello, L. (2002). The construct 'lifestyle' in market segmentation: The behaviour of tourist consumers. *European Journal of Marketing*, 36(1/2), 51-85.
- Goossen, C. M., & de Boer, T. A. (2008). *Recreatiemotieven en belevingssferen in een recreatief landschap : literatuuronderzoek* (No. 1692). Wageningen: Alterra.
- Goossen, C. M., & Donders, J. (2011). *Recreatiemotieven in het Nationaal Landschap Het Groene Woud* (No. 2301). Wageningen: Alterra.
- Gorton, W. A. (2010). The philosophy of social science [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy]. Retrieved January 20, 2015, from <http://www.iep.utm.edu/soc-sci/>.
- Guinn, R. (1980). Elderly Recreational Vehicle Tourists: Motivations for Leisure. *Journal of Travel Research*, 19(1), 9–12.
- Hallab, Z. (2006). Catering to the healthy-living vacationer. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 12(1), 71-91.
- Hayllar, B. (2003). Flow. In J. M. Jenkins & J. J. Pigram (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Leisure and Outdoor Recreation* (pp. 179–182). London: Routledge.
- Heij, S. (2014). *Agenda Natuurbeleving: Samen werken aan natuurbeleving*. 's-Graveland: Natuurmonumenten.
- Henderson, B., & Vikander (Eds.). (2007). *Nature First Outdoor life the friluftsliv way*. Toronto, Ontario: Natural Heritage Books.
- Hendricks, W. W., Schneider, I. I., & Budruk, M. (2004). Extending Importance-Performance Analysis with Benefit-Based Segmentation. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 22(1), 53–74.
- Herzberg, F., Mausner, B., & Bloch Snyderman, B. (2010). *The Motivation to Work* (12th ed.). New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.
- Heyd, T. (2007). *Encountering Nature: Toward an Environmental Culture*. England, USA: Ashgate.
- Hinds, J., & Sparks, P. (2008). Engaging with the natural environment: The role of affective connection and identity. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 28(2), 109–120.
- Hull, R. B. I. (1991). Mood as a product of leisure: Causes and consequences. In B. L. Driver, P. J. Brown, & G. L. Peterson (Eds.), *Benefits of leisure* (pp. 249–262). State College, PA: Venture Publischin, Inc.
- Jacks, B. (2007). Walking and reading in landscape. *Landscape Journal*, 26(2), 270–286.
- Jenkins, J. M. (2003). Activity. In J. M. Jenkins & J. J. Pigram (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Leisure and Outdoor Recreation* (pp. 5–8). London: Routledge.

- Jenkins, J. M., & Pigram, J. (2006). Outdoor Recreation. In C. Rojek, S. Shaw M., & A. J. Veal (Eds.), *A Handbook of Leisure Studies* (pp. 363–385). Great Britain: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jennings, G. (2010). Research Processes for Evaluating Quality Experiences: Reflections from the “Experiences” Field(s). In M. Morgan, P. Lugosi, & J. R. B. Ritchie (Eds.), *The Tourism and Leisure Experience: Consumer and Managerial Perspectives* (p. 259). Bristol, Buffalo, Toronto: Channel View Publications.
- Jensen, C., & Guthrie, S. (2005). *Outdoor Recreation in America* (6th ed.). USA: Hurman Kinetics Publishers
- Kaaristo, M., & Järvi, R. (2012). Our Clock Moves at a Different Pace: The Timescapes of Identity in Estonian Rural Tourism. *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, (51), 109–132.
- Kaplan, R. (1985). The analysis of perception via preference: A strategy for studying how the environment is experienced. *Landscape Planning*, 12(2), 161–176.
- Kaplan, R., Kaplan, S., & Ryan, R. (1998). *With people in mind: design and management of everyday nature*. Washington: Island Press.
- Karmanov, D. (2008). Research Methods in Landscape Perception and Experience. In H. de Haan & R. van der Duim (Eds.), *Landscape, leisure and tourism : socio-spatial studies in experiences, practices and policies* (pp. 17–30). Delft: Eburon.
- Kawulich, B. B. (2005). Participant Observation as a Data Collection Method. *Qualitative Social Research*, 6(2), 22.
- King, N., & Horrocks, C. (2010). *Interviews in Qualitative Research*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Klankbordgroep Planken Wambuis, & Districtscommissie Gelderland. (2007). *Planken Wambuis: beleving van natuur, rust en ruimte: visie van de Klankbordgroep Planken Wambuis (een bijdrage ten behoeve van de ontwikkeling van de natuursvisie van de vereniging Natuurmonumenten)*. 's-Graveland: Vereniging Natuurmonumenten.
- Knopf, R. (1987). Human behavior, cognition, and affect in the natural environment. In D. Stokols & I. Altman (Eds.), *Handbook of Environment Psychology* (pp. 789–826). New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Korvorst, M., Garssen, J., & Harmsen, C. (2013). Een op de zeven minderjarige kinderen woont in eenoudergezin. Retrieved October 1, 2014, from <http://www.cbs.nl/nl-NL/menu/themas/dossiers/jongeren/publicaties/artikelen/archief/2013/2013-3931-wm.htm>.
- Kotler, P., & Armstrong, G. (2013). *Principles Of Marketing* (15th ed.). New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Larsen, S. (2007). Aspects of a Psychology of the Tourist Experience. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 7(1), 7–18.
- Lengkeek, J. C. (1996). *Vakantie van het leven: over het belang van recreatie en toerisme*. Amsterdam: Boom.
- Lincoln, Y. S., Lynham, S. A., & Guba, E. G. (2011). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences, revisited. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (4th ed.). USA: SAGE Publishers.
- LNV. (1990). *Natuurbeleidsplan; Regeringsbeslissing*. Den Haag: SDU.
- LNV. (2000). *Natuur voor mensen, mensen voor natuur; Nota Natuur Bos en Landschap in de 21e eeuw*. Den Haag: Ministerie van LVN.
- Logemann, D., & Voskuil, A. (2001). *Het Nationaal Park Zuid-Kennemerland: een levend duingebied: een visie op het natuur- en recreatiebeheer in het Nationaal Park Zuid-Kennemerland*. 's-Graveland: Waterleidingbedrijf Noord-Holland, Vereniging Natuurmonumenten, Staatsbosbeheer.
- Maas, F. (2005). *Wind mee, stroom tegen 100 jaar Natuurmonumenten*. Terra Lannoo B.V.
- Manning, R. E. (2010). *Studies in Outdoor Recreation: Search and Research for Satisfaction* (3rd ed.). Oregon: Oregon State University Press.
- Manning, R. E., & Anderson, L. E. (2012). *Managing Outdoor Recreation Cases Studies in the National Parks*. Wallingford: CABI.
- Manning, R. E., & Valliere, W. A. (2001). Coping in Outdoor Recreation: Causes and Consequences of Crowding and Conflict Among Community Residents. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 33(4), 410–426.
- McCool, S. F., & Reilly, M. (1993). Benefit segmentation analysis of state park visitor setting preferences and behavior. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 11(4), 1–14.
- McCool, S. F., & Stephen, F. (2003). Carrying Capacity. In J. M. Jenkins & J. J. Pigram (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Leisure and Outdoor Recreation* (pp. 418–420). London: Routledge.
- McIntyre, N., & Roggenbuck, J. W. (1998). Nature/Person Transactions During an Outdoor Adventure Experience: A multi-Phasic Analysis. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 30(4), 401–422.
- Medway, D. (2015). Rethinking Place Branding and the “Other” Senses. In M. Kavaratzis, G. Warnaby, & G. Ashworth (Eds.), *Rethinking Place Branding Comprehensive Brand Development for Cities and Regions* (pp. 191–209). Manchester: Springer International Publishing.
- Ministerie van Economische Zaken. (2014). *Natuurlijk verder; Rijksnatuursvisie 2014*. Den Haag: Ministerie van Economische Zaken.
- Morse, J. M., & Field, P. A. (1996). *Nursing Research: The Application of Qualitative Approaches*. Cheltenham: Stanley Thornes.
- Moscardo, G. (2010). The Shaping of Tourist Experience: The Importance of Stories and Themes. In M. Morgan, P. Lugosi, & B. Ritchie (Eds.), *The Tourism and Leisure Experience: Consumer and Managerial Perspectives* (pp. 43–68). Bristol: Channel View Publications.
- Muderrisoglu, H., Aydin, S. Ö., Ak, K., & Eroglu, E. (2013). Effects of User Density Levels on Recreational Walking Experiences. *Indoor Built Environment*, 22(4), 640–6449.
- Natuurmonumenten. (2013). Natuurmonumenten nieuwe beheerder Heumensoord. Retrieved January 14, 2015, from <https://www.natuurmonumenten.nl/nieuws/natuurmonumenten-nieuwe-beheerder-heumensoord>.



- Natuurmonumenten. (2014a). Activiteitenkalender. Retrieved January 12, 2015, from <https://www.natuurmonumenten.nl/natuurgebied/nationaal-park-zuid-kennemerland/activiteiten>.
- Natuurmonumenten. (2014b). Bezoekerscentra: Ideaal startpunt voor een dagje uit. Retrieved September 12, 2014, from <https://www.natuurmonumenten.nl/bezoekerscentra>.
- Natuurmonumenten. (2014c). Dieren en planten. Retrieved January 13, 2015, from <https://www.natuurmonumenten.nl/natuurgebied/planken-wambuis/dieren-en-planten>.
- Natuurmonumenten. (2014d). Grote Natuur Enquête. Retrieved October 13, 2014, from <https://www.natuurmonumenten.nl/achterbanraadpleging>.
- Natuurmonumenten. (2014e). Meer over Natuurmonumenten. Retrieved September 29, 2014, from <https://www.natuurmonumenten.nl/natuurmonumenten>.
- Natuurmonumenten. (2014f). Natuurgebied Heumensoord. Retrieved January 12, 2015, from <https://www.natuurmonumenten.nl/natuurgebied/heumensoord/over-dit-gebied>.
- Natuurmonumenten. (2014g). Natuurgebied Karding. Retrieved January 12, 2015, from <https://www.natuurmonumenten.nl/karding>.
- Natuurmonumenten. (2014h). Natuurgebied Planken Wambuis. Retrieved January 13, 2015, from <https://www.natuurmonumenten.nl/natuurgebied/planken-wambuis/over-dit-gebied>.
- Natuurmonumenten. (2014i). Over Nationaal Park Zuid-Kennemerland. Retrieved January 11, 2015, from <https://www.natuurmonumenten.nl/natuurgebied/nationaal-park-zuid-kennemerland/over-dit-gebied>.
- Natuurmonumenten. (2014j). Welkom in de wereld van OERRR! Retrieved September 12, 2014, from <https://www.natuurmonumenten.nl/kinderen>.
- Natuurmonumenten. (2015a). Agenda activiteit: Timmer een vleermuiskast op Planken Wambuis. Retrieved January 13, 2015, from <https://www.natuurmonumenten.nl/activiteiten/timmer-een-vleermuiskast-op-planken-wambuis/2015-05-03t1300>.
- Natuurmonumenten. (2015b). Nieuws: Winterwandeltocht in Karding. Retrieved January 12, 2015, from <https://www.natuurmonumenten.nl/nieuws/winterwandeltocht-in-karding>.
- NBTC-NIPO Research. (2013). *Continu Vakantie Onderzoek*. Amsterdam / Den Haag: NBTC-NIPO Research.
- Newsome, D., Moore, S. A., & Dowling, R. K. (2013). *Natural Area Tourism Ecology, Impacts and Management* (2nd ed.). Bristol, Buffalo, Toronto: Channel View Publications.
- Nickerson, N. P., & Black, R. J. (2000). Changes in Family and Work: Impacts on Outdoor Recreation and Tourism in North America. In W. C. Gartner & D. W. Lime (Eds.), *Trends in Outdoor Recreation, Leisure and Tourism* (pp. 29–36). New York: CABI Publishing.
- NRIT Onderzoek. (2008). *Recreatieonderzoek Nationaal Park Zuid-Kennemerland*. Nieuwegein: NRIT Onderzoek.
- Oh, H., Assaf, A. G., & Baloglu, S. (2014). Motivations and Goals of Slow Tourism. *Journal of Travel Research*, 1(15), 1–15.
- Onderzoek en Statistiek Groningen, gemeente Groningen. (2014). *Stadsmonitor gemeente Groningen 2014*. Groningen: Gemeente Groningen. Retrieved from <http://www.os-groningen.nl/images/stories/rapport/sjb/Stadsmonitor2014.pdf>.
- Opdenakker, R. (2006). Advantages and Disadvantages of Four Interview Techniques in Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Social Research*, 7(4), Art. 11.
- O&S Groningen RUG/HHG. (2014). Kerncijfers [studenten], 2014 - gemeente Groningen: Gemeente Groningen. Retrieved February 6, 2015, from [http://groningen.buurtmonitor.nl/default.aspx?cat\\_open\\_code=c109&presel\\_code=ps](http://groningen.buurtmonitor.nl/default.aspx?cat_open_code=c109&presel_code=ps).
- Patterson, M. E., Watson, A. E., & Roggenbuck, J. R. (1998). An Hermeneutic Approach to Studying the Nature of Wilderness Experiences. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 30(4), 423–452.
- Pearce, P. L. (1991). Fundamental of tourist motivation. In D. G. Pearce, and R. W. Sutter (Eds.), *Tourism Research: Critiques and Challenges*. London: Routledge.
- Pellitero, M. (2011). The Phenomenological Experience of the Visual Landscape. *Research in Urbanism Series*, 2, 57–71.
- Pigram, J. J. (2003a). Globalization. In J. M. Jenkins & J. J. Pigram (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Leisure and Outdoor Recreation* (pp. 208–209). London: Routledge.
- Pigram, J. J. (2003b). Perception. In J. J. Pigram & J. M. Jenkins (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Leisure and Outdoor Recreation* (pp. 359–360). London: Routledge.
- Pine, J., & Gilmore, J. H. (2011). *The Experience Economy: Work Is Theater & Every Business a Stage*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Plummer, J. T. (1974). The Concept and Application of Life Style Segmentation. *American Marketing Association*, 38(1), 33–37.
- Pomfret, G. (2006). Mountaineering adventure tourists: a conceptual framework for research. *Tourism Management*, 27(1), 133–123.
- Porteous, J. D. (1990). *Landscapes of the mind: worlds of sense and metaphor*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Provincie Gelderland Statistisch zakboek. (2014a). Bevolking totaal naar leeftijd. Retrieved February 3, 2015, from <http://www.gelderland.databank.nl>.
- Provincie Gelderland Statistisch zakboek. (2014b). Naar leeftijd en geslacht [aantal] 2014 Gemeenten. Retrieved February 3, 2015, from <http://www.gelderland.databank.nl>.
- Provincie Noord Holland. (2014). Noord-Holland in Cijfers. Retrieved January 26, 2015, from <http://www.noord-holland.nl/web/Over-de-provincie/NoordHolland-in-Cijfers.htm>.

- Randall, & Kathy, A. (1998). The Passionate Fact: Storytelling in Natural History and Cultural Interpretation. *Journal of Adult Education*, 26(1), 35.
- Ribe, R. G. (2002). Is scenic beauty a proxy for acceptable management? The influence of environmental attitudes on landscape perceptions. *Environment and Behaviour*, 34(6), 757–780.
- Richards, G., & Wilson, J. (2007a). Tourism development trajectories: From culture to creativity. *Tourism, Creativity and Development*, 6, 1–33.
- Richards, G., & Wilson, W. (2007b). The creative turn in regeneration: Creative spaces, spectacles and tourism in cities. In M. K. Smith (Ed.), *Tourism, Culture and Regeneration* (pp. 12–24). Wallingford: CABI.
- Rodríguez, A. (2011). Leisure and Relationship to Quality-of-Life Satisfaction. In M. Budruk & R. Philips (Eds.), *Quality-of-life Community Indicators for Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management* (p. 249). Dordrecht, Heidelberg, London, New York: Springer.
- Russel, J. A. (1980). A circumplex model of affect. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 39(6), 1161–1178.
- Sandlos, J. (1998). The Storied Curriculum: Oral Narrative, Ethics, and Environmental Education. *Journal of Environmental Education*, 30(1), 5–9.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2012). *Research Methods for Business Students* (6th ed.). Essex: Pearson.
- Schouten, J. W., McAlexander, J. H., & Koenig, H. F. (2007). Transcendent customer experience and brand community. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 35(3), 357–368.
- Schwandt, T. A. (2000). Three epistemological stances for qualitative inquiry: Interpretivism, hermeneutics, and social constructionism. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Landscape of Qualitative Research* (pp. 189–213). London: Thousand Oaks.
- Scott, N., & Parfitt, N. (2005). Lifestyle Segmentation in Tourism and Leisure: Imposing Order or Finding It? *Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality & Tourism*, 5(2-4), 21–139.
- SmartAgent. (2010). *Het BSR- segmentatiemodel voor Recreatie en toerisme De Gastvrij Nederland doelgroepen*. Amersfoort: SmartAgent.
- SmartAgent. (2012a). *De leefstijlatlas dagrecreatie voor de provincie Noord-Holland*. Noord-Holland: Provincie Noord-Holland.
- SmartAgent. (2012b). *De regionale leefstijlatlas dagrecreatie Regio de Veluwe*. Gelders Overijssels Bureau voor Toerisme.
- SmartAgent. (2012c). *Leefstijlatlas dagrecreatie de doelgroepen in kaart*. Amersfoort: SmartAgent.
- Smith, R. A. (2003). Landscape. In J. M. Jenkins & J. J. Pigram (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Leisure and Outdoor Recreation* (pp. 274–275). London: Routledge.
- Stichting het nationale park de hoge veluwe. (2015). The Hoge Veluwe National Park. Retrieved June 5, 2015, from <https://www.hogeveluwe.nl/en>.
- Sturges, J. E., & Hanrahan, K. J. (2004). Comparing telephone and face-to-face qualitative interviewing: a research note. *Qualitative Research*, 4(1), 107–118.
- Sverrisdóttir, H. (2011). The destination within. *Landabréð Journal of the Association of Icelandic Geographers*, 25, 77–84.
- Theeschenkerij Mossel. (2013). Boerderij Mossel. Retrieved January 14, 2015, from <http://boerderij-mossel.nl/>.
- The SmartAgent Company. (2011). *De regionale leefstijlatlas dagrecreatie Regio Arnhem / Nijmegen*. Gelders Overijssels Bureau voor Toerisme.
- Thijs, J. J., & van de Laar, S. (2013). *Samenvatting onderzoeksrapport Kleur bekennen in Apeldoorn*. Driebergen-Rijsenburg: Bureau voor Ruimte & Vrije Tijd. Retrieved from <http://www.ruimteenvrijetijd.nl/downloads%20artikelen%20en%20rapporten/samenvatting%20rapport%20Apeldoorn%20eindversie.pdf>
- Trendwatching.com. (2014). Post-demographic consumerism. Retrieved from <http://trendwatching.com/trends/post-demographic-consumerism/>.
- Urry, J. (2002). *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.
- Uysal, M., Jurowski, C., Noe, F. P., & McDonald, C. D. (1991). Environmental attitude by trip and visitor characteristics: US Virgin Islands National Park. *Tourism Management*, 15(4), 284–294.
- Van der Zande, A. N., Berkhuizen, J. C., van Latesteijn, H. C., ter Keurs, W. J., & Poppelaars, A. J. (1984). Impact of outdoor recreation on the density of a number of breeding bird species in woods adjacent to urban residential areas. *Biological Conservation*, 30(1), 1–39.
- Van Marwijk, R. B. M. (2009). *These routes are made for walking: Understanding the transaction between nature, recreation behaviour and environmental meanings in Dwingelderveld National Park, the Netherlands* (Thesis). Wageningen University, Wageningen.
- Van Tooren, B., & de Graeff, J. (2012). *Visie Natuurmonumenten op natuur en landschap in 2040, De Levende Natuur*. 's-Graveland: Vereniging Natuurmonumenten.
- Varley, P., & Semple, T. (2015). Nordic Slow Adventure: Explorations in Time and Nature. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 15(1-2), 73–90.
- Veal, A. J. (1993). The concept of lifestyle: a review. *Leisure Studies*, 12(4), 233–252.
- Veer, M., & van Middelkoop, M. (2002). *Mensen en de natuur Recreatief gebruik van natuur en landschap* (Planbureau-werk in uitvoering). Den Haag: Stichting Recreatie, Kennis- en Innovatiecentrum.
- Vereniging Natuurmonumenten. (2014). *Natuur in Beweging Jaarverslag 2013*. 's-Graveland. Retrieved from <http://jaarverslag.natuurmonumenten.nl/nl/natuurmonumenten-html/cover.html>
- Vereniging Natuurmonumenten, & Terra Lannoo. (2011). *365x de natuur in met Natuurmonumenten*. 's-Graveland: Terra.

- Verschuren, P. J. M. (2011). *Praktijkgericht onderzoek Ontwerp van organisatie en beleidsonderzoek*. Den Haag: Boom Lemma.
- Walker, G. J., & Deng, J. (2003). Comparing leisure as a subjective experience with the Chinese experience of rûmî. *Leisure*, 28(3-4), 245–276.
- Walliman, N. (2006). *Social research methods*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Weber, K. (2001). Outdoor Adventure Tourism: a Review of Research Approaches. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 28(2), 360-377.
- Whittaker, S., & Whittaker, D. (2003). Crowding. In J. M. Jenkins & J. J. Pigram (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Leisure and Outdoor Recreation* (pp. 89–91). London: Routledge.
- Willson, G. B., & McIntosh, A. J. (2007). Heritage Buildings and Tourism: An Experiential View. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 2(2), 75–93.
- Wirth, D. M., & Gamon, J. A. (1999). The Art of Situated Narrative: A Tool to Teach Environmental Ethics. *Journal of Vocational Education Research*, 24(1), 45–61.
- Yin, R. K. (2013). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (5th ed.). London: SAGE Publications.
- Yoon, Y., & Uysal, M. (2005). An examination of the effects of motivation and satisfaction on destination of loyalty: a structural model. *Tourism Management*, 26(1), 45–56.

## Appendix

Appendix I	Info graphic Natuurmonumenten
Appendix II	Literature overview
Appendix III	Interview guide
Appendix IV	Observation and interview locations
Appendix V	Open-ended question survey
Appendix VI	Observation guide

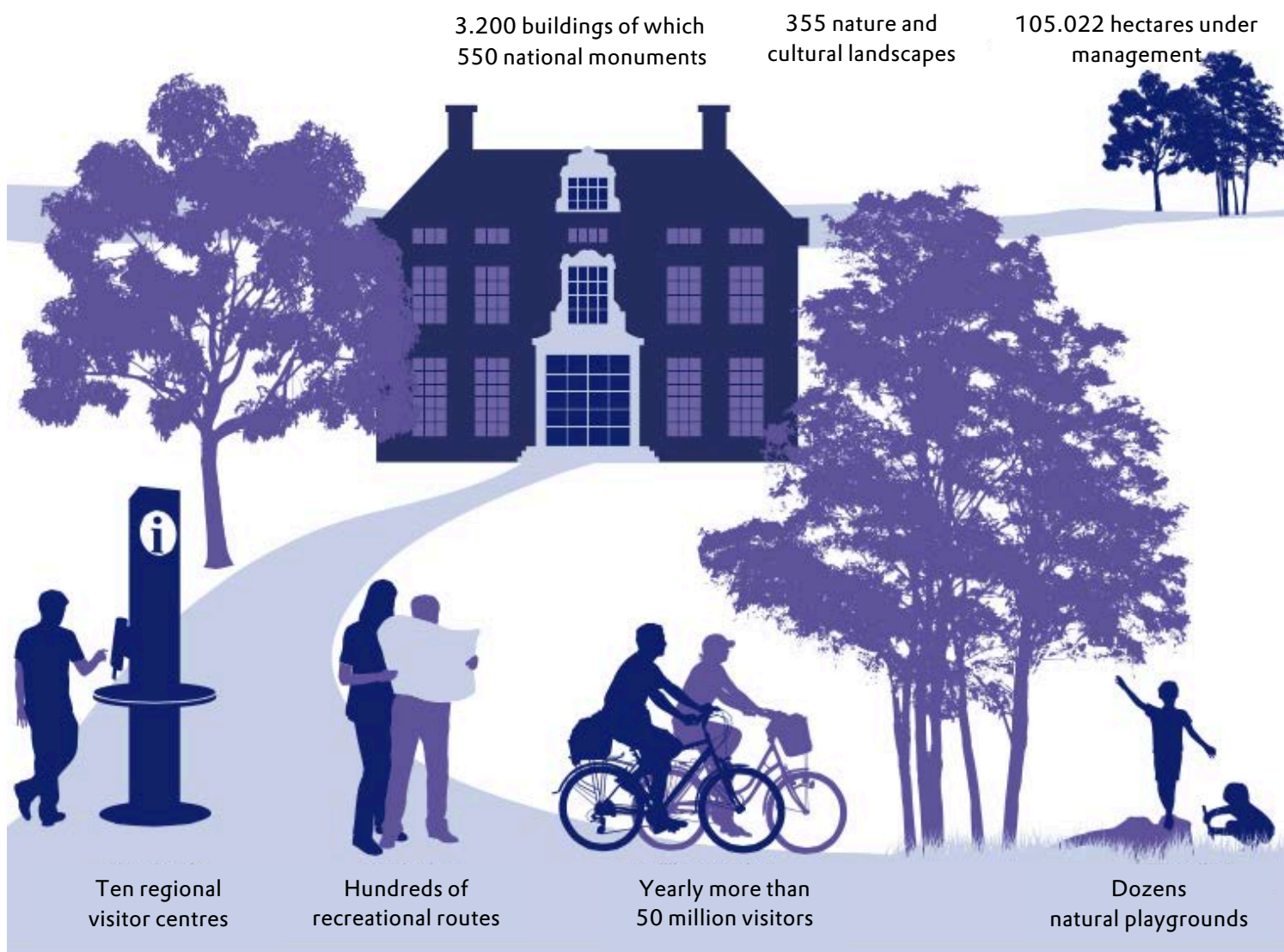




## Appendix I – Info graphic Natuurmonumenten



Map of Natuurmonumenten areas (Natuurmonumenten 2014, p.11)



Areas and buildings (Natuurmonumenten 2014, p.10)



## Appendix II – Literature overview

The scheme below gives an overview of all the literature used for the theoretical backbone of this study. The literature is structured by key theme.

Key Themes Outdoor Recreation and the Visitor Experience	Literature Studies
<b>Outdoor Recreation</b>	Van der Zande, et al. (1984); Kaplan (1985); Knopf (1987); Kaplan, Kaplan and Ryan (1998); Brown (2003); Jenkins (2003); Jensen and Guthrie (2005); Jenkins and Pigram (2006); Bell, et al. (2007); Henderson and Vikander (2007); Bell (2008); Bell, et al. (2009); Best (2010); Manning (2010); Gelter (2011); Rodríguez (2011); de Bruijn, et al. (2012) Manning and Anderson (2012); de Bruijn, et al. (2013); Muderrisoglu, Aydin, and Eroglu (2013); Newsome, Moore, and Dowling (2013).
<b>Defining experiences</b>	McIntyre and Roggenbuck (1998); González and Bello (2002); Brown (2003); Driver (2003); Buijs and de Vries (2005); Henderson and Vikander (2007); Larsen (2007); Schouten, McAlexander, Koenig (2007); Bell (2008); Bingé Gnoth, and Andreu (2008); Hinds and Sparks (2008); de Vries (2009); Gelter (2009); van Marwijk (2009); Best (2010); Cutler and Carmichael (2010); Manning (2010); Gelter (2011); Pellitero (2011); Rodríguez (2011); Newsome, Moor, and Dowling (2013).
Dimensions of experiences:	
<b>Flow experience</b>	Csikszentmihalyi (1975); Pearce (1991); Ewert (1994); González and Bello (2002); Hayllar (2003); Pomefret (2006); Henderson and Vikander (2007); Schouten, McAlexander, Koenig (2007); Hinds and Sparks (2008); Cohen (2010); Manning (2010); Gelter (2011); Rodríguez (2011).
<b>Perception and Motivation</b>	Guinn (1980); Dann (1981); Bieger and Leasser (2002); Weber, 2001; González and Bello (2002); Ribe (2002); Pigram (2003b); Yoon and Uysal (2005); Buijs, Pedroli and Luginbül (2006); Beh and Bruyere (2007); Heyd, 2007; Larsen (2007); Cutler and Carmichael (2010); Manning (2010); Goossen and Donder (2011).
<b>Crowding</b>	Manning and Valliere (2001); Brown (2003); Whittaker and Whittaker (2003); Bell, et al. (2007); Manning (2010); Manning and Anderson (2012); Muderrisoglu, Aydin, and Eroglu (2013).
<b>Moods and emotions</b>	Russel (1980); Hull (1991); McIntyre and Roggenbuck (1998); Bingé, Gnoth and Andreu (2008).
<b>Stories and events</b>	Lengkeek (1996); Randall and Kathly (1998); Sandlos (1998); Wirth and Gamon (1999); Ribe (2002); Walker and Deng (2003); Blizard and Schuster (2007); Heyd (2007); Jacks (2007); Goossen & de Boer (2008); Moscorado (2010).
<b>Multisensory</b>	Porteous (1990); Urry (2002); Pine and Gilmore (2011); Medway (2015).
<b>Trends in outdoor recreation and experiences</b>	Buhalis (2000); Gartner and Lime (2000); Nickerson and Black (2000); González and Bello (2002); Pigram (2003a); Hallab (2006); Bell et al. (2007); Bingé Gnoth, and Andreu (2008); Cordell (2008); Dolnicar (2008); Boksberger and Laesser (2009); Gelter (2009); de Bruijn, et al. (2012); Arts and Otten (2013), de Bruijn, et al. (2013); Oh, Assaf and Baloglu (2014); Trendwatchers.com (2014).
<b>Experiencing nature and landscape</b>	Kaplan (1985); Lengkeek (1996); Williams and Patterson (1996); Kaplan, Kaplan and Ryan (1998); Veer and van Middelkoop (2002); Smith (2003); Buijs, Pedroli and Luginbül (2006); Henderson and Vikander (2007); Jacks (2007); Bell (2008); Bel et al. (2009); de Vries (2009); van Marwijk (2009); Cutler and Carmichael (2010); Manning (2010); Pellitero (2011).

## Appendix III - Interview guide

Number Interview:  
Place:  
Date, time:  
Interviewee: male / female  
Gezelschap:  
Remarks:

### Opening questions

- Ben u vandaag lekker van de natuur aan het genieten?
- Heeft u een fijne .....(activiteit) gehad?

→ Vragen of hij/zij mee wil doen met een interview?

### Introductie

*Persoonlijk introductie:* ik ben een student van de universiteit Wageningen, op het moment doe ik daar de master Leisure, Tourism & Environment. Omdat ik in het laatste jaar zit schrijf ik nu mijn scriptie.

*Onderwerp:* introductie van het onderzoek. Ik doe onderzoek naar de belevenis die mensen hebben in de gebieden van Natuurmonumenten. Aangeven dat ze ook net in een gebied van Natuurmonumenten hebben gerecreëerd. Door meer te weten te komen over wat de bezoekers ervaren, kan Natuurmonumenten leren wat er speelt bij hun gasten, en eventueel ze tegemoet komen.

*Het interview - uitleg geven over:*

- Het interview duurt circa 30 minuten
- Het interview bestaat uit vier thema's: uw belevenis, de activiteit, de omgeving / het gebied zelf en de verhalen over en de gebeurtenissen in het gebied.
- Uitleggen dat ze het interview op elke punt mogen stoppen.
- Dat de persoon anoniem blijft
- Rol differentiatie: tijdens het interview stel ik de vragen en u geeft mij antwoord waar mogelijk. Ik hoor graag al uw gedachten, ideeën, ervaringen. Het kan zijn dat ik u ga onderbreken wanneer we van het onderwerp afwijken, of het interview dreigt uit te lopen. Dit doe ik dus niet omdat ik niet geïnteresseerd ben in uw antwoorden.
- De vragen zijn erg open, dus ik wil u vragen of u gewoon wilt zeggen wat in uw opkomt bij die vraag. U kunt het bijvoorbeeld vertellen op de manier waarop u het aan vrienden of familie zou vertellen die u een vraag stelt.
- Vraag voor toestemming om het interview op te nemen en leg het gebruik uit van de notities.

- Start met opname -

1. Kunt u op de kaart aangeven waar u vandaag bent geweest in het gebied?

Leeftijd:

Gemeente:

Bent u lid van Natuurmonumenten?:

Ja

Nee

Komt u vaker in het gebied wat u net heeft bezocht? En zo ja, hoe vaak?

---

## De belevenis

2. Waarom bent u vandaag de natuur ingegaan?

*Keywords: ontspanning, ontsnapping, fit*

3. Wat heeft u doen beslissen om naar dit gebied te komen?

*Keywords: **activiteit**, eerdere ervaringen, motieven, verwachtingen (uitgekomen), faciliteiten*

4a. Welk plekje vindt u het meest speciaal van dit gebied?

4b. En waarom?

5. Zijn er momenten geweest tijdens uw .... (activiteit) dat u helemaal opging in de natuur?

- Zo ja: Op wat voor momenten gebeurde dit? (doorvragen: hoe was dat dan, hoe voelde dat?)

- Zo nee: Waarom denk u dat dit niet gebeurde? (doorvragen: was de natuur niet mooi genoeg? Bezig met elkaar, met gedachten?)

*Keywords: focus on nature as an object or place, self and internal thoughts, others, emotions and affect, task or activity.*

6a. Het prikkelen van de zintuigen kan zorgen voor een fijnere natuurbeleving. De zintuigen zijn: horen, zien, ruiken, voelen, proeven. In hoeverre zijn uw zintuigen negatief en/of positief geprikkeld toen u in het natuurgebied was?

6b. En wat betekende dat voor uw natuurbeleving?

7a. Welke emoties heeft u ervaren tijdens uw .....(activiteit)?

7b. Kunt u uitleggen waar deze emoties vandaan kamen of door beïnvloed werden?

*Keywords: afgesloten gebieden, management, balans mens-natuur, toegang, design,*

## Activiteiten

8. U heeft in dit gebied ..... (activiteit). Kunt u uitleggen wat u precies verstaat onder deze activiteit?

9. Waarom heeft u voor deze activiteit gekozen?

**10.** Wat vindt u belangrijk in het gebied wat u net bezocht heeft om de activiteit zo fijn mogelijk uit te voeren?

**11.** Welke activiteiten zou u ook in dit gebied willen doen maar waar nog niet de mogelijkheid voor is? En waarom?

*Keywords: afwegingen, behalen van doel, verfrissing of ontsnapping aan drukke stad*

## **De omgeving**

**12.** Wat vond u van de informatie voorziening over routes, faciliteiten en dergelijke?

*Keywords: bebording*

**13a.** In hoeverre vond u de omgeving geordend?

**13b.** Wat voor invloed had dit op uw natuurbeleving?

*Keywords: Bijvoorbeeld georganiseerd in duidelijk gebieden, duidelijke routes, veel bomen*

**14.** In welk opzicht vond u dit gebied anders of memorabel in vergelijking met andere gebieden?

*Keywords: uitzonderlijkheid, memorabele/herkenbare elementen.*

**15a.** Wat vond u van de diversiteit wat betreft planten en dieren in de natuur?

**15b.** Wat voor invloed had dit op uw natuurbeleving?

*Keyword: complexiteit, afwisseling, verschillende soorten landschappen*

**16.** In hoeverre was uw nieuwsgierigheid gewekt om het gebied verder te onderzoeken tijdens .... (activiteit)?

*Keywords: mysterieus*

## **Verhalen en gebeurtenissen**

**17.** Welke verhalen en achtergronden kent u die bij dit gebied horen?

**18.** Welke behoefte heeft u aan informatie over de natuur en/of cultuur historie van dit gebied?

**19.** Welke persoonlijke herinneringen heeft u aan dit gebied?

*Keywords: waar info gevonden? Cultuur historie, mensen die hier hebben gewoond, speciale objecten*

## **Laatste vraag**

**20.** Welke veranderingen moet Natuurmonumenten doorvoeren om uw beleving in dit natuurgebied nog aantrekkelijker te maken?

*Keywords: interactie met natuur, faciliteiten, bebording, algemene indruk*

- Einde opname -

Heeft u nog vragen of opmerkingen naar aanleiding van dit interview?

### **Afsluiten**

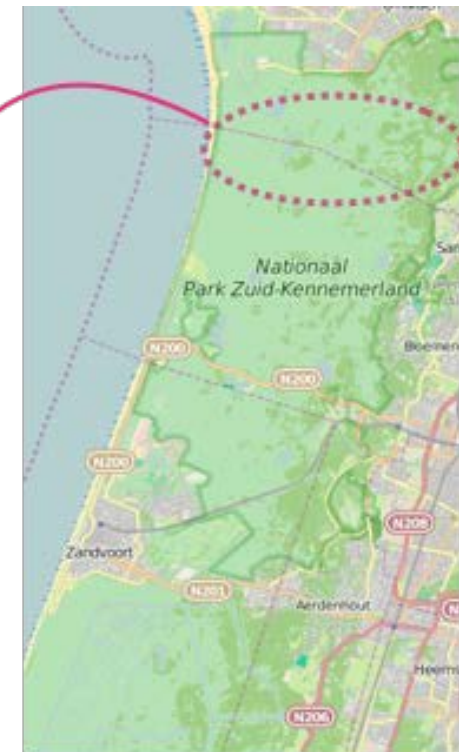
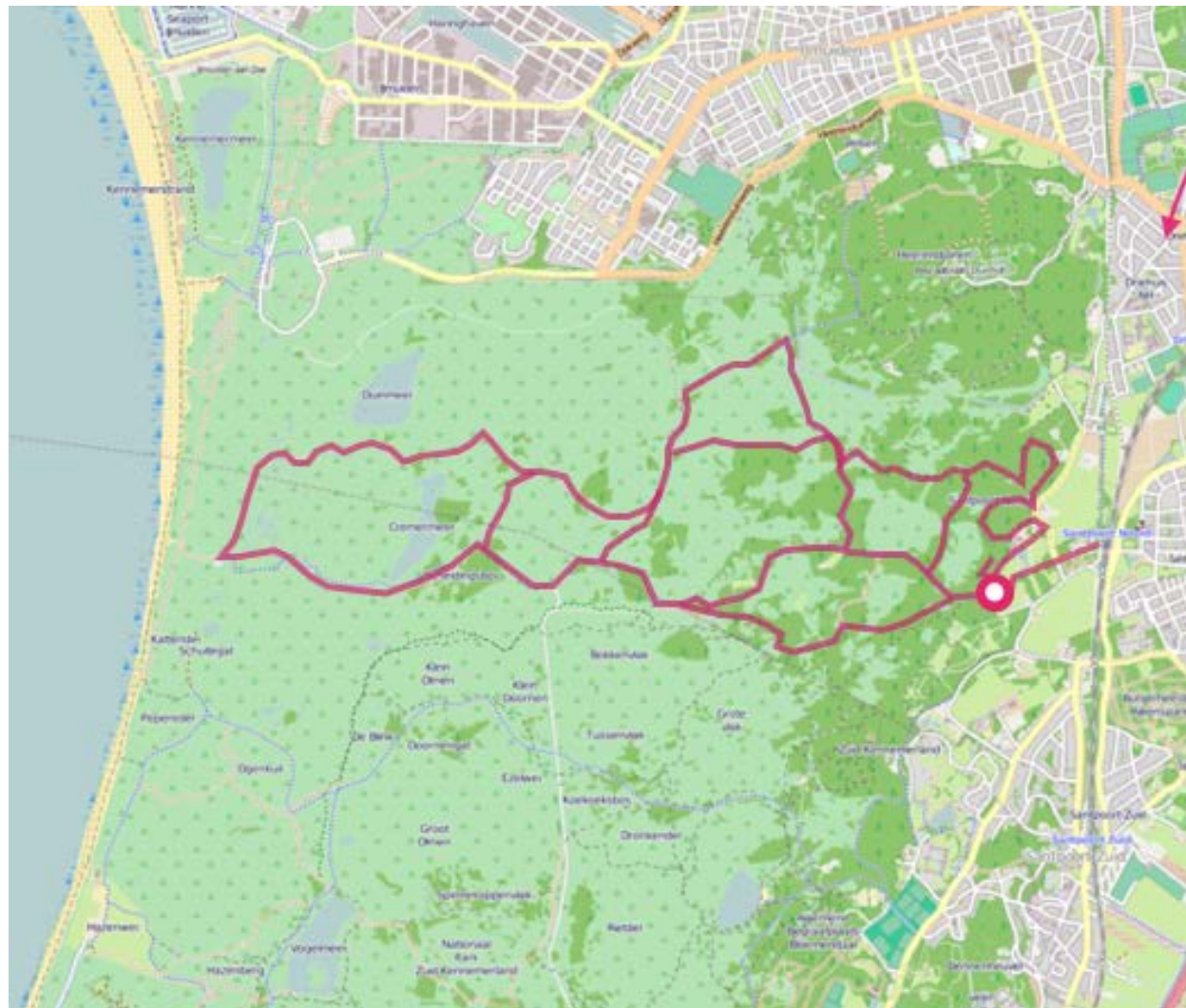
Hartelijk bedankt voor deelname en kaartje met naam en e-mail adres erop geven voor het geval ze nog vragen hebben.

*Observational memo (behaviour):*

*Methodological memo (changes in interview):*

## Appendix IV – Observation and interview locations

### Zuid-Kennemerland (Noord-Holland)



- Observation route
- Interview locations



## Planken Wambuis (Gelderland)



## Heumensoord (Gelderland)



- Observation route  
○ Interview locations



## Kardinge (Groningen)



— Observation route  
○ Interview locations

# Appendix V – Open-ended question survey

## Link example online survey

An example of the online survey can be found via the link:

<http://www.thesistools.com/web/?id=439653>

This survey was sent to people visiting Heumensoord who were mountain biking in this nature.

## Online survey

Below, the questions of the online surveys are provided.

### Natuurbeleving in [area]

Alvast ontzettend bedankt voor uw bijdrage aan mijn onderzoek. Voor u begint met het beantwoorden van de vragen zal ik u eerst informatie geven over de structuur van de vragenlijst en uw anonimiteit.

#### Structuur

Het merendeel van de vragen in deze vragenlijst bestaat uit open vragen. Er worden vier thema's besproken: de natuur beleving, de activiteit, het natuurgebied en de verhalen over het gebied. De vragenlijst sluit af met een aantal algemene vragen.

Aangezien ik erg benieuwd ben naar uw gedachten, ideeën en ervaringen stel ik het erg op prijs als u uitgebreid antwoord kan geven op de vragen. Het duurt 10 tot 20 minuten om deze vragenlijst in te vullen, afhankelijk van hoe uitgebreid u antwoord geeft. U bent natuurlijk niet verplicht om vragen in te vullen waar u zich niet comfortabel bij voelt.

#### Anonimiteit

Alle gegevens uit de vragenlijst worden anoniem verwerkt. De ingevulde vragenlijst en uw e-mailadres worden niet ter beschikking gesteld aan Natuurmonumenten. De vereniging ontvangt een totaalrapport waarin alleen de conclusies van het gehele onderzoek worden besproken.

### I. De natuurbeleving

1. U bent afgelopen [dag] [datum] de natuur ingegaan. Wat was daarvan de reden?
2. Waarom heeft u specifiek voor [naam natuurgebied] gekozen?
3. Zijn de verwachtingen die u had ten aanzien van dit gebied uitgekomen? En waarom?
4. Welk plekje of welke plekken vindt u het meest speciaal van dit gebied? En waarom?
5. Het prikkelen van de zintuigen kan zorgen voor een fijnere natuurbeleving. De zintuigen zijn: horen, zien, ruiken, voelen en proeven. In hoeverre zijn uw zintuigen negatief en/of positief geprikkeld toen u in het natuurgebied was?

6. Wat betekende dat voor uw natuurbeleving?
7. Welke emoties heeft u ervaren tijdens het [activiteit]? Denk bijvoorbeeld aan vreugde, blij, geïrriteerd, angst, woede, verbazing, bewondering, trots, etc.
8. Kunt u uitleggen waar deze emoties vandaan kwamen of door beïnvloed werden?
9. Zijn er momenten geweest tijdens het [activiteit] dat u helemaal opging in de natuur?  
Yes  
No
10. Yes: Op wat voor moment(en) ging u helemaal op in de natuur en waardoor kwam dat? Of:
11. No: Waarom denkt u dat u niet helemaal op kon gaan in de natuur?

## II. De activiteit

12. U heeft [activiteit] in [naam natuurgebied]. Waarom heeft u voor deze activiteit gekozen?
13. Kunt u een omschrijving geven van de route die u [activiteit] heeft? De kleur of naam van de route is ook voldoende.
14. Welke eisen stelt u als [activiteit] aan een natuurgebied? Komt dit natuurgebied u daarin tegemoet?
15. Welke activiteiten zou u ook in dit gebied willen doen maar waar nog niet de mogelijkheid voor is? Mist u iets in dit gebied?

## III. Het natuurgebied

16. Wat vond u van de informatievoorziening over routes, faciliteiten en dergelijke in en om het natuurgebied?
17. In hoeverre vond u de omgeving geordend en overzichtelijk? Kon u gemakkelijk de weg vinden?
18. Wat voor invloed hadden de informatievoorziening en indeling van het gebied op uw natuurbeleving?
19. In welk opzicht vond u dit gebied anders of memorabel in vergelijking met andere natuurgebieden?
20. Wat vond u van de diversiteit wat betreft planten en dieren in de natuur?
21. Wat voor invloed had deze diversiteit op uw natuurbeleving?
22. In hoeverre werd u tijdens het [activiteit] uitgedaagd /geprikeld om het gebied verder te onderzoeken?

#### IV. Verhalen en gebeurtenissen

23. Welke cultuurhistorische verhalen en natuurhistorische achtergronden kent u die bij dit gebied horen?

24. Welke behoefte heeft u aan informatie over de natuur- en/of cultuurhistorie van dit gebied?

25. Heeft u persoonlijke herinneringen aan dit gebied? Zo ja, kunt u daar iets over vertellen?

#### Laatste vragen

26. Welke veranderingen moet Natuurmonumenten doorvoeren om uw beleving in dit natuurgebied voor u nog aantrekkelijker te maken?

27. In welke gemeente woont u?

28. Wat is uw leeftijd?

29. Bent u een man of een vrouw?

Man

Vrouw

30. Heeft u het gebied alleen of samen met anderen bezocht?

Alleen

Samen met andere volwassene(n)

Samen met anderen, waaronder kind(eren) onder de 14 jaar.

31. Hoe vaak bezoekt u (ongeveer) natuurgebied Kardinging?

Dit was de eerste keer

Bijna elke dag

Een keer per week

Een keer per twee weken

Een keer per drie weken

Een keer per maand

Een of enkele keren per jaar

Incidenteel

32. Bent u lid van Natuurmonumenten?

Ja

Nee

33. Om af te sluiten, heeft u nog suggesties, ideeën, feedback ?

#### Ter afsluiting

Hartelijk bedankt dat u de tijd wilde nemen om deze vragenlijst in te vullen. U heeft een grote bijdrage geleverd aan mijn onderzoek.

Mocht u nog vragen of opmerkingen hebben, dan kunt u contact met mij opnemen via:  
i.homan@natuurmonumenten.nl.



## Appendix VI – Observation guide

Direct observations of people by taking part in the participant's everyday life makes it possible as a research to get insight in what happens, who or what are involved, when and where things happen and how they occur (Boeije, 2010, p.59). An observation guide was created to make it possible to record the various elements of observation into field notes. These elements include the physical environment involving the surrounding of the setting, the visitors, and the interaction between the activities of the visitors and the setting in which they occur.

### Location

Observations were conducted in the four research areas where also the interviews were conducted. There was not fixed position, rather the observations were conducted in the natural area.

### Actors

Some criteria were defined to recognise individuals from the different segments.

#### *Modest aqua*

- Carry out activities such as (Nordic) walking and biking
- People who are alone or in couples
- Helpful and interested in other

#### *Entrepreneurial purple*

- Carry out sportive activities such as running and mountain biking
- Around the age of 35 until 54
- Youngster couples

### Activities

Observations took approximately between the two and three hours depending on the weather and the number of people present in the area. The goal was to capture the interaction between visitors and the landscapes within different user groups. Specifically was looked at:

- Difficulties different user groups experience
- Way-finding
- Triggering of the sense

### Suitability of the situation

*Simplicity*: by 'looking over the shoulder' of the visitors, it was possible to see what different user groups undertake and wheatear they experience difficulties.

*Accessibility*: the central office as well as the foresters for the specific research areas al gave permission to do observations and interviews for this research.

*Permissibleness*: the visitors are followed in a soft manner; they did not notice they were being observed. As the observation took place in a public space, and on a small scale, there is not expected that the visitors need to give permission of being observed.

*Unobtrusiveness*: by observing from a distance it was not expected that visitors changed their natural behaviour.

## Main topics during the observations

- 1. When?**
  - Date
  - Place
  - Location
  - Weather conditions
- 2. Who?**
  - Gender
  - Appearance (including clothing, things they brought)
- 3. What?**
  - Interaction with nature? / Causes of interaction
  - Interaction with other visitors
  - Activities
  - Expressed emotions
- 4. With whom?**
  - Company
  - Interaction with company
- 5. Setting**
  - Setting with which they interact
  - Facilities used in setting
  - Barriers / obstacles?
  - How is space used?

