NatuurWijs in de toekomst

Verkenning van de haalbaarheid van uitvoering door vrijwilligers en van opschaling naar Nationale Parken

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Summary

The future of the NatuurWijs nature education programme

Feasibility of programme implementation by volunteers and of increasing the scale to that of National Parks

General
This report is based on a study to investigate whether it is useful and feasible to expand the NatuurWijs nature education programme to the scale of Dutch National Parks and to explore the potential role of volunteers as guides. NatuurWijs is a nature education programme intended for primary school pupils, who spend three days in wildlife areas under the guidance of a professional ranger. The study was initiated because subsidies for the programme are being terminated. The NatuurCollege foundation (the initiator of the programme) and the national forestry service Staatsbosbeheer are exploring options for feasible and affordable ways to continue the programme. The study involved interviews with stakeholders as well as a desk study.

Feasibility of scaling up to National Park level
NatuurWijs differs from other hands-on nature education programmes by a combination of the head-heart-hands approach to education, the three-day format and a 'concept-context' approach. An assessment of the educational programmes currently offered in Dutch National Parks showed that introducing NatuurWijs could provide added value, as hardly any of the currently available programmes have a design that is comparable to that of NatuurWijs. This would be an argument to expand the NatuurWijs programme to National Park scale. Such an expansion is, however, unrealistic in the short term. The National Parks managers are not interested, as they recently decided to adopt a different nature education programme, called Woordvoerders van de Natuur ('spokespersons for nature'). There may well be opportunities in the longer term, however, in view of the unique features of the NatuurWijs programme.

The Dutch National Parks are generally situated in rural areas. Since one of the objectives of the NatuurWijs programme is to contribute to a sustainable society, the NatuurCollege foundation should ideally also think about expanding the programme to more urban locations, as this is where children tend to be most alienated from nature and natural environments.

Feasibility of replacing professional rangers by volunteers
Our literature review and interviews with parties involved suggest that the use of volunteers as guides will, generally speaking, require the organisation to adopt a different approach, as the appreciation and remuneration would have to fit in with each individual volunteer's personal motivation. Hence, a 'person–situation fit' would be a precondition to achieve the necessary commitment among the volunteers and secure the continuity of the organisation.

We also predict that engaging volunteers in the programme may entail quality issues, and it would be important for the NatuurCollege foundation to be prepared for such issues. As the professional context of the rangers is abandoned, the volunteers will have to define their own context. Training courses for the volunteers should help them find a context that they feel comfortable with and that offers them a guideline for the further detailed implementation of the NatuurWijs programme. The concept-context approach implies that the guides have to contribute to the programme content and have to be very flexible. Volunteers with little experience of supervising groups of schoolchildren may find this difficult. The NatuurCollege foundation could help overcome these problems by formulating a more clearly defined programme. Activities that have proved to be successful should become regular programme features. Finally, the head-heart-hand approach requires the continued involvement of professional rangers, for instance to coach the volunteers. A crucial condition for this would appear to be that ranger and volunteer operate in the same area. Resources would have to be allocated to train not only the volunteers but also new rangers.
Wageningen UR, Wetenschapswinkel

Wageningen UR (University & Research centre) ondersteunt met de Wetenschapswinkel maatschappelijke organisaties als verenigingen, actiegroepen en belangenorganisaties. Deze kunnen bij ons terecht met onderzoeksvragen die een maatschappelijk doel dienen. Samen met studenten, onderzoekers en maatschappelijke groepen die hiervoor zelf de middelen niet hebben, maken wij inspirerende onderzoeksprojecten mogelijk.

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Rapport 283