

Educating the Next Generation of Nature Entrepreneurs

Judith C. Jobse, Loes Witteveen, Judith Santegoets, and Daan van der Linde

Abstract—With this paper, it is illustrated that a focus on entrepreneurship training in the nature and wilderness sector is relevant for diverse organisations and situations. The first curricula on nature entrepreneurship are currently being developed. In this paper the authors describe a project that focusses on educating the next generation of nature entrepreneurs, reflect on the Erasmus Intensive Program ‘European Wilderness Entrepreneur’ and the Wild10 World Café on nature entrepreneurship training. Sharing and learning from experiences is highly recommended to further develop and strengthen the curricula while considering the dynamic context of nature conservation and restoration of ecological processes.

Introduction

Traditionally nature conservationists are not trained in business development and entrepreneurship. It is often assumed that nature conservation related professions are principally guided by ecological and sustainability principles, which therefore define the educational design of nature conservation curricula. However, the context of dwindling subsidies, uncertain financial contexts for nature conservation and persistent competing claims by diverse stakeholders, require alternative professional competences to address current conservation challenges. Several actors

in European wilderness conservation and restoration are adopting conservation strategies that aim to achieve economic sustainability. For instance, Rewilding Europe included wilderness-based entrepreneurship in their main objectives¹, and the NGO Wild Europe² launched an economic benefits group in 2013 to stimulate “a new breed of wilderness warrior”. Due to the rise of these new European wide conservation initiatives there is a need to train students and professionals in wilderness or nature entrepreneurship.

In this paper and the book chapter by Jobse et al. (in press) the terms wilderness and nature entrepreneurship are used. Currently, nature entrepreneurship is defined by the authors as an individual’s ability to turn sustainable ideas that contribute positively to nature management goals into action. Wilderness entrepreneurship is very similar to nature entrepreneurship, but with the difference that wilderness entrepreneurship is related to wilderness or areas in the process of becoming wilder instead of all areas that are considered ‘nature’. One could argue that in the context of the study area Western Iberia, as described in Jobse et al. (in press), the term ‘rewilding entrepreneurship’ might be more suitable but in the context of this paper wilderness entrepreneurship is seen as a broad concept which also applies to rewilding areas which are not considered wilderness at this moment.

To educate the next generation of nature conservationists it is necessary to develop curricula that incorporate innovative learning approaches that are consistent with new and upcoming contexts and requirements. Van Hall Larenstein University of Applied Sciences (VHL) leads a project that focusses on educating the next generation of nature entrepreneurs. This paper aims to briefly describe this project and some of its outcomes. The paper starts with an overview of the various strategies that nature conservation organizations have applied over time and then describes the project outcomes with a focus on the newly developed curricula on nature entrepreneurship. The paper concludes with the results from the World Café session on “Educating the next generation of nature entrepreneurs” organized at Wild10.

Judith C. Jobse is lecturer at the (Tropical) Forestry and Nature Management Program, Van Hall Larenstein University of Applied Sciences (VHL), Velp, The Netherlands. Phone: +31263695541, email: judith.jobse@wur.nl. Loes Witteveen is senior lecturer Rural Development and Communication, VHL, Wageningen, The Netherlands. Phone +31317486301, e-mail: loes.witteveen@wur.nl. Judith Santegoets is project assistant Integrated Nature and Landscape Management, VHL, Velp, The Netherlands. Phone +31263695817, e-mail: judith.santegoets@wur.nl. Daan van der Linde is lecturer Regional Development at the Forestry and Nature Management Program, VHL, Velp, The Netherlands. Phone: +31263695723, email: daan.vanderlinde@wur.nl.

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¹ rewildingeurope.com last retrieved on 2-7-2014.

² wildeurope.org last retrieved on 2-7-2014.

Conservation and Sustainable Development

In the 1980's the more socially-oriented goals of sustainable development were linked to the traditional nature-centered agenda of biodiversity conservation. Conservation NGOs started incorporating agroforestry, ecotourism, and various models of sustainable use in their Integrated Conservation and Development projects (ICDPs) (Alpert 1996; Miller 2011). This approach is heavily debated using parks vs. people/biodiversity protection vs. sustainable development arguments (Miller 2011). "Nature protectionists" who support a strong protected area's (parks) approach with no human presence are against ICDPs (Miller 2011). "Social conservationists" argue that rural development strategies should be integrated into conservation strategies in developing countries because conservation would fail if poverty is not addressed (Alpert 1996; Miller 2011). ICDPs were definitely not successful everywhere but "people-oriented" conservationists argued that ICDPs could work if they are well planned and designed and adaptive to changes (Miller 2011).

Many international conservation organizations have moved further into "neoliberal conservation" (Igoe and Brockington 2007). International conservation NGOs, like IUCN, WWF and Conservation International, started to build partnerships with business and industries to help this private sector to adopt strategies that benefits biodiversity³ but not without protest from other NGOs (MacDonald 2010). Also European national governments and the European Commission stimulate private public partnerships and other engagements to link EU business with biodiversity. NGOs are in the process of expanding these type of activities to the increased demand of the private sector. Another aspect of neoliberal conservation is the serious quest for market-driven conservation which emerged since the concept of ecosystem services was put on the international policy agenda by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005). So far most conservation actions in protected parks as well as ICDPs (Alpert 1996) were largely depended on funds from foreign donors or taxpayers. Payments of ecosystem services schemes are thought to be an important tool to incorporate economic sustainability into biodiversity conservation strategies.

The recently founded NGO Rewilding Europe incorporates economic sustainability into their strategy and therefore Conservation Capital⁴ became their partner to develop business strategies that could promote rewilding processes of European landscapes. Conservation Capital draws heavily from African conservation examples. Educational and academic partners joined Rewilding Europe's effort on this theme by organising the symposium "The Business of Nature Conservation. What Europe can learn from Africa"⁵. During the symposium The African Wildlife Foundation (AFW) presented their lessons learned from their conservation enterprise strategy which they introduced in the 1990's.

AFW first developed enterprises in the field of tourism (mostly Eco lodges), later they diversified the conservation enterprise model to include other sectors such as agriculture, bio-enterprises and livestock-based enterprises (Nthiga et al 2011). AFW's challenges with the Conservation Enterprises Strategy include "financing, governance, benefit sharing as well as skills and management transfer modalities by the private investors to the communities" (Nthiga et al. 2011). The above mentioned symposium marked the start of the project 'European Nature Entrepreneur'.

Project 'European Nature Entrepreneur'

In the project 'European Nature Entrepreneur' the NGO Rewilding Europe and three Dutch educational institutes (Helicon, Van Hall Larenstein University of Applied Sciences (VHL) and Wageningen University), who deliver life sciences, rural development and nature education from vocational to PhD level, collaborate to develop innovative curricula. The project envisages having nature entrepreneurship included in curricula and creating learning environments where students of different educational levels and background collaborate with each other and with professionals in Rewilding Europe's pilot areas. The new curricula emerge from a collaboratively developed research agenda for the Rewilding Europe pilot area in Western Iberia. Scientists and lecturers in social and environmental sciences, ecology and economy collaborated with leaders and managers in nature conservation and management active in this pilot area.

The first batch of students have conducted internships and thesis projects as part of the collaborative research program. Their output includes reports on "Rewilding and Tourism: Analysis of an Optimistic Discourse on Nature Conservation" by Margaryan (2012), "Implementing Rewilding in Western-Iberia. Analysing the stakeholder context." by Poppen (2012), "The cadastre of Rewilding Europe in Portugal: Reinventing the Portuguese cadastre with Associação Transumância e Natureza" by Beukers (2013), "Facilitating social learning to increase levels of local involvement: the case of Associação Transumância e Natureza in Portugal" by Leuvenink (2013) and "Negotiating the Production of Space: the implementation of Rewilding in Northeast Portugal" by Walet (2014). Most of these studies indicate the difficulty of implementing the concept of rewilding in this region due to the different world view that most locals have compared to the view of Rewilding Europe and its local partners. The studies share the recommendation that to get support of local stakeholders with a very different world view much more effort should go to planning and facilitating stakeholder involvement processes than has been the case so far by Rewilding Europe. More attention to stakeholder involvement can also help to stimulate local entrepreneurship with benefits for nature conservation. Workshops around nature or wilderness entrepreneurship could be part of a successful stakeholder involvement strategy as experienced during the Erasmus Intensive Program 'European Wilderness Entrepreneur' (Jobse et al. in press) and the workshops initiated by Leuvenink (2013).

³ iucn.org last retrieved on 2-7-2014.

⁴ conservation-capital.com last retrieved on 14-7-2014.

⁵ vanhall-larenstein.com/News/181/African-nature-management-an-example-for-Europe.aspx last retrieved on 2-7-2014.

New Curricula on Nature Entrepreneurship

Curriculum outputs of the project with a focus on nature entrepreneurship are a 30 ECTS bachelor minor International Nature Entrepreneur at VHL University of Applied Sciences and Wageningen University, and a 14 day long Erasmus Intensive Program 'European Wilderness Entrepreneurship' (in cooperation with universities in Bulgaria, Croatia, Portugal, Spain and Sweden), which both ran for the first time in the spring semester of 2013. The learning strategy for these new curricula is competence based and simulates professional situations, which require students to learn and use relevant knowledge, skills and attitude, while practising diverse professional roles. This implies that learning outcomes for students do not focus exclusively on enhanced subject-specific knowledge but focus on composite learning outcomes such as entrepreneurship, networking, stakeholder consultation, conflict management, and intercultural communication. The new curricula are developed to achieve nature entrepreneurship competences for students of various levels with an interest in nature, forests, wildlife, animal sciences, rural development, tourism, recreation, sustainability, and business development.

For the new bachelor minor International Nature Entrepreneur, VHL developed a course titled International Nature Entrepreneur (INE). Students taking the new INE course are trained in competences for international nature entrepreneurship, defined as: an individual's ability to turn sustainable ideas that contribute positively to nature management goals into action while working with individuals from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds. As a main assignment of the course students have to write a business plan that deals with the socially, ecologically and economically sustainable use of an area that has high (potential) ecological value or that contributes positively to the goals of a nature organization in general. In addition, students have to write a personal development plan to acquire entrepreneurship competences throughout the course and beyond.

Within the framework of this same minor the Erasmus Intensive Programme 'European Wilderness Entrepreneurship' (IP EWE) has been developed to give students a hands-on experience of how new entrepreneurial activities may be created and implemented locally. In 2013 and 2014, IP EWE was funded by the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme⁶ (LLP). LLP subsidized travel and subsistence costs of participating students and lecturers. During the IP EWE, students explored a specific region, which Rewilding Europe envisages to 'rewild', and interacted with stakeholders engaged in the development of the region. The chosen region in 2013 and 2014 is currently is not considered wilderness but Rewilding Europe and it's local partners have the ambition to restore ecological processes in such a way that the area has a chance to turn into wilderness over time. Developing an economy around this trajectory towards wilderness is one of the main strategies of the Rewilding Europe to reach their goal.

Lessons Learned for Wilderness Entrepreneurship Education

The first edition of the Erasmus Intensive Program 'European Wilderness Entrepreneurship' (IPEWE) is described in the chapter "Preparing a new generation of wilderness entrepreneurs: lessons from the Erasmus Intensive Programme 'European Wilderness Entrepreneurship' 2013" (Jobse et al. in press) in the book *Rewilding European Landscapes* (Pereira and Navarro in press). In the next section the lessons learned as described in that chapter will be summarized and supplemented with some examples.

A first lesson learned refers to competences that should be attained in wilderness entrepreneurship: opportunity competence, social competence, normative competence, complexity competence and business competence. The authors indicate that two aspects might be missing in this set of competences which are critical: reflection and conflict transformation. For example, dealing with conflicts between opposing stakeholders, such as sheep farmers and a wolf watching company, requires professional competences on mediation and conflict management.

The second lesson learned elaborates a need for a learning strategy that focuses on the involvement of diverse actors in meeting and engaging in exchange of knowledge, expertise, opinions and other communicative resources. This leads to a learning context in which students meet and engage with diverse stakeholders as they visit rural communities and farms, attend municipal activities, local festivals and markets, and participate in tourist activities. For example, action research methodologies such as transect walks and immersion can be applied.

The third lesson learned also influences the learning strategy as it concludes that learning about European wilderness entrepreneurship takes place where the practice is discernible and that aspects of dissonance should be added to this learning environment, such as intensiveness and exposure to different cultures, disciplines and backgrounds. The environment should challenge both learners and lecturers in a way that learning takes place at the boundaries of comfort zones, building on positive friction between self and external regulation. For example, if Rewilding Europe wants to attract more international visitors to a region such as Western Iberia, entrepreneurs have to understand and be able to deal with the (cultural) differences and interests between the potential visitors, the inhabitants of the region and the staff who will interact with both groups. IP staff and students experienced these differences themselves and were expressed in statements like "...biologists spend too much time looking at all kind of creatures when walking a trail", "I can't work with my group members because they have very different ideas and opinions...", and "...in the end we did manage to come to an agreement about our idea and it was not what I had expected beforehand".

The three lessons learned relate to each other and provide tools to use for curriculum design on wilderness entrepreneurship. To learn wilderness entrepreneurship competences, an environment should be created in which students, teachers and stakeholders learn from each other in a challenging way. This means in this context a call for outdoor lecturing with all conveniences involved such as exposure to the environment in which wilderness entrepreneurs might have

⁶ ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus/ip_en.htm retrieved on 13-11-2013

to operate. Creativity and out of the box thinking, both essential for building a new future for wilderness entrepreneurship, need unique experiences in which learners embark on unknown activities with a basic feeling of comfort. This consideration of comfort zones coincides with Wals (2007) whom states “The trick is to learn on the edge of people’s individual comfort zone with regards to dissonance: if the process takes places too far outside of this zone, dissonance will not be constructive and block learning. However, if the process takes place within peoples’ comfort zones –as is the case when homogenous groups of like-minded people come together – learning is likely to be blocked as well”.

Designing IP EWE 2014

The learning environment for the IP EWE 2014 was similar to the 2013 version. Universities from 6 EU countries participated in a 14 day long intensive programme in the Western Iberian pilot area of Rewilding Europe’s. During the IP staff and students worked in intercultural and multidisciplinary groups on a variety of activities. The common goals for organizing and executing IP EWE 2014 were formulated based on the institutional goals of each partner university. The common goals were stated in the IP EWE 2014 staff manual (Jobse et al. 2014) as follows: “...

1. To educate the future generation of wilderness entrepreneurs in the diverse study programmes of the European partner universities;
2. To expose students and staff to an international experience and create new creative inroads in their thinking processes;
3. Increase competence levels of staff in designing and implementing in wilderness entrepreneurship;
4. Through social contact with other students and staff, open students’ horizons and ability to experience companionship and grow cross-cultural curiosity and tolerance;
5. Create networks with participating universities and stakeholders for future cooperation on research and training projects;
6. To gain experience in collaboratively organised Intensive programs which staff members can share within their own university.
7. To develop and evaluate curricula and learning strategies for wilderness entrepreneurship.”

For the IP EWE 2014 VHL aimed to elaborate a framework where the wilderness competences are used to formulate a set of comprehensive and matching set of learning outcomes. VHL envisaged the realisation of learning outcomes to be directly linked to learning strategies and the constructed learning environment. The programme elements, learning outcomes, the learning activities and the learning strategy followed design principles formulated in the IP EWE 2014 staff manual (Jobse et al. 2014). VHL worked with the competences indicated above and defined for each competence a set of learning outcomes. The learning outcomes were coupled with learning strategies and learning environments (Table 1). This iterative process was influenced by the vision that experiential, reflective and social learning should be discernible.

Results From Wild10: Building Blocks for Nature Entrepreneurship Training

At Wild10, Van Hall Larenstein University of Applied Sciences, as the main IP EWE organizing university in 2014, organized a round table session ‘Educating the next generation of nature entrepreneurs’ using the World Café format (Brown et al. 2002). During the Wild World Café Training for Wilderness Entrepreneurship, WILD10 participants with an interest in this topic gathered. The session was organized to network and brainstorm on possible building blocks of a nature entrepreneurship training network. About 20 people from 7 different countries in North America, Europe and Asia participated and worked in four groups. Each group started with getting to know their group members by explaining backgrounds, involvement with nature entrepreneurship and the reason for attending the session. This was followed by brainstorming about what should be covered in a nature entrepreneurship training network (Fig. 1). These were referred to as building blocks. Each group selected two building blocks to share with all World Café participants (Fig. 2).

Participants of the World Café at WILD10 recognized the need for nature entrepreneurs. When comparing the presented building blocks (Fig. 2) with wilderness entrepreneurship competences described by Jobse et al. (in press) a link to two of the five competences can be observed. One group emphasized that marketing and presentation (communication) skills are needed to promote wilderness or rewilding which refers to both the business and social competence.

The building block “Plan” is related to business competence. The group representative explained the need for this building block: “Planning is necessary to start up an organisation. This could be a business plan or a strategic plan. Project management is necessary, just as promoting your organisation for donors.”

The building block “Building friendships” was explained as “Friendships are necessary for fundraising. Possible actions include public relations, media relations and crowd sourcing.” This building block seems related to social competence, which includes according to Lans et al. (2013) “the ability to build up and maintain relationships externally as well as internally”.

The building block “Fun opportunities” may link to social competence, although it may also be linked to business competence, because in its explanation a reference to the FISH! Philosophy was made. The FISH! Philosophy contains “four simple practices that help energize a team, deliver remarkable customer service and increase employee retention”⁷.

The building block “Full spectrum mentoring” can be seen as a way to create a learning environment in such a way that facilitates learning of social competence. By providing students with an “entrepreneurial” mentor that serves as a role model, as well as, a facilitator for networking opportunities, enhances learning for social competences.

⁷ charthouse.com retrieved on 13-11-2013

Table 1—Overview of competencies, their learning outcomes and general learning activities of the Erasmus Intensive Programme European Wilderness Entrepreneur (IP EWE) 2014 as described in the staff manual from 22 March 2014 (Jobse et al. 2014).

Competence	LO #	Learning outcome (LO)	General learning activity
Opportunity competence	1.1	Problem spotting	Explore the Western Iberia context
	1.2	Eye for innovation	Draw landscapes from different perspectives
	1.3	Sense of creativity	Imagine landscapes and rural livelihood options
	1.4	Foresight thinking	Invent business model proposals
	1.5	Action-orientation	Pitch and promote business model
	1.6	Self-efficacy	Consult local stakeholders on business proposal
Social competence	2.1	Dealing with diversity	Work in international and interdisciplinary groups
	2.2	Dealing with multi-stakeholder contexts	Meet local stakeholders
	2.3	Communication	Deal with language diversity in group work, communicating with IP staff and locals
	2.4	Facilitation	Facilitate own wilderness experience
	2.5	Enabling participation	Facilitate own wilderness experience
Normative competence	3.1	Dealing with sustainability	Articulate different scenarios for rural development
	3.2	Decision making for sustainability	Choose a scenario for rural development
	3.3	(EU) citizenship	Share images of wilderness entrepreneurship from diverse EU backgrounds
Complexity competence	4.1	Identify and analyse (sub)systems and domains	Scope the region ecologically and socio-economically
	4.2	Understand and reflect on boundaries and interdependencies	Identify and elaborate on actor and ecosystem analysis
	4.3	Exploring uncertain futures, recognising and articulating intergenerational livelihood differences	Capture, share and reflect on life stories in Western Iberia village
Business competence	5.1	Realise business opportunities	Elaborate on a selected business model using the Business Model Canvas as a tool
	5.2	Manage business opportunities	Share the business model with local stakeholders

The complexity competence was not specifically mentioned during the group presentations but a reference was made to it at the end of the Wild World Café when Anish Andheria (President of the Wildlife Conservation Trust, India) was asked to respond to the buildings blocks which were posted on the wall: “I recognize everything. Conservation issues are people issues. Therefore, you need a 360 degree understanding of the subject. This includes social capacities to interact with indigenous people, understanding of the law, capacities to train other (local) people and the skills to gain substantial finances.” In his answer the complexity competence emerges when he mentions the need for a 360 degree understanding of the subject.

This leaves the normative competence unmentioned, which is a much harder competence for most people to appreciate. In Jobse et al. (in press), the normative competence was described as “the ability to deal simultaneously with diverse dimensions. These dimensions may be perceived as conflictive yet require to be integrated in a sustainability perspective

such as economic, ethic, political social and environmental dimensions. This integrative view on society and environment makes that this competence also deals with moral decision-making and citizenship (Closs and Antonello 2011).”

A suggestion that resulted from the World Café was the recognition of volunteers as a relevant group who could benefit from nature entrepreneurship training. Organisations like The Conservation Volunteers⁸ could offer training and mentoring in entrepreneurship to their volunteers. Also brought on stage during the World Café by “adults allies” of the GENwild young participants (13 to 18 year olds) was the fact that the youngsters who came to Salamanca developed their entrepreneurship competences, like networking and fundraising, in the process of preparing for and attending WILD10.

⁸ tcv.org.uk retrieved on 13-11-2013



Figure 1—At each table group members get to know each other and brainstorm on building blocks for nature entrepreneurship training during a Wild10 World Café (photo by Daan van der Linde).



Figure 2—Selected “building blocks” by four groups after brainstorming on nature entrepreneurship training during a Wild10 World Café (photo by Daan van der Linde).

Conclusions

Participants of the World Café at WILD10 recognized the need for nature entrepreneurs. In the World Café, competences for this new type of entrepreneur that were considered important in training coincide with the social and business competences as identified by Jobse et al. (in press). Educational programmes have to facilitate learning for entrepreneurship competences, to train people and organisations to achieve new business opportunities for nature. Challenging learning environments with diverse actors involved are necessary.

This paper illustrates that a focus on entrepreneurship training in the nature and wilderness sector is relevant for diverse organisations and situations. The first curricula on nature entrepreneurship are currently being developed, involving a diverse and international group of universities and other actors. Sharing and learning from these experiences is recommended to further develop and strengthen the curricula while considering the dynamic context of nature conservation and the restoration of ecological processes.

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