



YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN THE NATIONAL PARKS

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*Report from primary research into a contemporary issue within an organisation
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YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN THE NATIONAL PARKS

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| <u>Why Youth Engagement is an Issue</u> | 3 |
| <u>Mosaic: Campaign for National Parks</u> | 3 |
| <u>Ethics</u> | 5 |
| <u>Primary Research</u> | 6 |
| <u>External Focus Group</u> | 7 |
| <u>Internal Focus Group</u> | 10 |
| <u>Summary for the Stakeholders</u> | 11 |
| <u>Contact Information</u> | 13 |
| <u>Bibliography</u> | 14 |

The views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and do not necessarily represent those of the National Park Authority or Mosaic: Campaign for National Parks.



YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN THE NATIONAL PARKS

Why Youth Engagement is an Issue

Mosaic: Campaign for National Parks

The mission statement of Mosaic is: CNP campaigns to protect and promote National Parks for the benefit and quiet enjoyment of all. Its aims are:

1. To promote the protection and conservation of national parks for the benefit of the nation,
2. To promote the quiet enjoyment of national parks and the appreciation of their natural beauty by the public in an informed and understanding manner;
3. To advance public education in and understanding of national parks, through the provision of education material and by other means;
4. To promote and undertake research into issues affecting the conservation and enjoyment of national parks and to make public the useful results of any such research.

“What does a young champion do?”

“You’ll get to know the National Park through taster days with other young champions and two residential weekends each year, organised by Mosaic and the National Park Authority.” (Mosaic website) In my role as a champion and project volunteer for Mosaic: Campaign for National Parks, I must find ways of promoting positive involvement with young people in the National Park. The targeted young people are from local areas that are considered deprived and also surrounding the National Parks and between the ages of 16 to 25, there for, finding innovative ways to engage young people is key to succeed.

After we have engaged the young people into the National park, Mosaic champions and the Mosaic project officer will help the young person identify what they want to get from the National Park. This can be a variety of things from: personal development that increases confidence and wellbeing in the young person, introducing them to other Mosaic champions and staff at the National Parks for friends and networking possibilities, exploring and gaining experience in the National Park so they can share this with friends and family, educational courses and employment options within the National Park, volunteering opportunities to gain practical experience and knowledge, organising their own youth events in the National Park and having access to funding to support their events.

For the National Park I volunteer directly with (Lake District National Park) young people are seen as the future. Young people will have a direct influence on the National Parks because they rely on volunteers to support the organization. Two thirds of the volunteers in the Lake District National Park are retired (evidence from internal focus group) and without young people volunteering they will not have a stable future when the retired volunteers decide to stop volunteering.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN THE NATIONAL PARKS

“A third of English 16-24 year olds did some volunteering in the past year, compared to 24.7% five years ago” (Sainsbury, 2013) This statistical survey proves that young people in England are choosing to volunteer. With so many young people in higher education now, it is hard to compete for employment, so volunteering gives young people a good practical experience to go with the educational theory, and a good reference on a C.V. This makes volunteering attractive to young people.

As well as volunteers, young people can offer many benefits the organization. “Depending on young people’s interests and skills, youth influence on organisations can occur at various levels, ranging from involvement through consultation to shared leadership” (Dotterweich, 2004) Some benefits from youth engagement include: extra human resources by sharing responsibilities between adults and young people, youth and adults sharing skills and knowledge from each other, new energy, fresh ideas and enthusiasm brought into programs, Additional data that may be obtained only by youth and an increased acceptance of organisation’s services, messages and decisions as youth contributed to shape them.

The Mosaic project is great for engaging young people in the National Parks but the project closes in 2016 (Mosaic Strategy) and the sustainability of youth engagement is a big issue for the National Park Authority.



YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN THE NATIONAL PARKS

Ethics

It is important for the National Parks to treat young people ethically and equal.

“The central imperative for partnership with the natural world is to see it as it is.” (Newton, 2005)

Newton explains how different business ethics affect the natural world in which the business is located, this can relate to how the National Parks vary from each other, as does the young people living in the surrounding areas. Two branches of business ethics Newton orients around are “Conservation” and “Preservation”, she argues that it is much more important to preserve rather than to indulge, using examples of elephants for their ivory and tigers for their pelts.

Another approach from John Muir, in relation to preserving the National Parks suggest that wilderness should be “accessible for the public,” however we have created a dilemma between wilderness preservation and public access. A century after their founding, our National Parks are being “loved to death” by a public all too eager to “appreciate nature.” “The preservation of untouched nature has what can only be called a moral value” (Newton, 2005)

Young people who are not involved with the National Park, or even the local community, tend not to stay there. Young people want to gain skills, experience, knowledge, employment and fun. If the National Parks aren’t offering anything to young people, they will go elsewhere, this is known as brain drain.

Definition of brain drain:

“The loss of skilled intellectual and technical labor through the movement of such labor to more favorable geographic, economic, or professional environments.” (The free dictionary, 2010)

The way young people are engaged by staff and volunteers at the National Park is very important, because it will leave a lasting memory with them. “Many say that the skills they have learned and the experience of personal development have left a lasting impression.” (ASDAN case study) If this encounter is a bad experience then chances the young person will engage again are low, thus closing any opportunities that might arise for them in the National Park.



YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN THE NATIONAL PARKS

Primary Research

I looked into different methods to gather data through quantitative and qualitative research. “Quantitative measurements are quantitatively accurate; qualitative evaluations are more subject to the errors of human judgement.” (LaPiere, 1934) This conflicts with Weiss’ theory: “it is a simple fact that many people are uncomfortable in dealing with quantitative data.” (Weiss, 1976) LaPiere argues the results from qualitative research are less accurate than that of quantitative, but Weiss advocates qualitative data by claiming fact that many people are uncomfortable with dealing with quantitative data.

| | Qualitative | Quantitative |
|----------------|--|---|
| Conceptual | Concerned with understanding human behaviour from the informant's perspective Assumes a dynamic and negotiated reality | Concerned with discovering facts about social phenomena Assumes a fixed and measurable reality |
| Methodological | Data are collected through participant observation and interviews Data are analysed by themes from descriptions by informants Data are reported in the language of the informant | Data are collected through measuring things Data are analysed through numerical comparisons and statistical inferences Data are reported through statistical analyses |

Source: Adapted from Minichiello et al. (1990, p. 5)

Michiello contrasts qualitative and quantitative methods in a table that has helped me in choosing my primary research method. “Individual interviews do not have the benefits of group dynamics that are integral to the overall effectiveness of the focus group technique.” (Greenbaum, 2000) This tells me the benefit of a focus group compared to individual in depth interviews.

For my research method I have chosen to conduct two focus groups; One internal for the staff, members and volunteers at the Lake District National Park Authority, and the other External for young people who volunteer as mosaic champions. From the results gathered from both focus groups, I will look into the contrasts and similarities of opinions in order to find suggestions and recommendations to help engage young people in the National parks.

The focus group is important because it will help to find out the personal opinions of each stakeholder and form primary research in writing this report. It will also provide Good experience in planning and preparing future focus groups, understanding aims of the focus groups, the reactions & responses of stakeholders and also how others have done it.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN THE NATIONAL PARKS

External Focus Group

The first focus group was facilitated during the annual event for Mosaic young champions held in the Yorkshire Dales at the Grinton Lodge YHA (Youth Hostel Association). This was a very busy residential packed with activities each day, so with the project manager's permission I was able to fit in a focus group on the Saturday evening during social time.

With assistance of Clare Dyson (Lake District Mosaic project officer) we selected fourteen willing Mosaic champions to help in my focus group. This was a large number of people for a group, despite Greenbaum's theory that states: "People may be more willing to share more in an individual versus a group environment." (Greenbaum, 2000) because I needed the young people to share their thoughts, and I believed they would feel safer and comfortable in a group of their peers.

I also tested Krueger's theory that "Focus groups are typically composed of seven to ten people, but the size can range from as few as four to as many as twelve. The size is conditioned by two factors: it must be small enough for everyone to have opportunity to share insights and yet large enough to provide diversity of perceptions." (Krueger, 1988) while having fourteen is more than the amount Krueger recommends, I feel I managed to achieve both a diverse group of external stakeholders based in different National Parks but also facilitating the group so everyone got equal opportunity.

"Professionals are sometimes held captive by their language and inadvertently use technical terms or jargon that sound highfalutin and confuse and put off lay audiences." (Krueger & Casey, 2000) For this focus group with external stakeholders I decided to be as informal as possible. Because the stakeholders are young people, I wanted to get rid of the academic jargon and talk to them how they would talk to me and I tried to avoid lots of paperwork to fill in by informing them of my research purpose and asking for consent verbally instead of getting them to read and fill in forms.

I explained their purpose in my research while they signed consent to take part. I told them that I had to research an issue in the National parks: "youth engagement" and who else better to ask than the youth themselves. I said I wanted their opinions on why this is an issue, and from this I went round the whole group getting different answers.

One of the first replies that described the traditional crowd who visit the National Parks as: "White, middle class people who go on walks that are boring." They explained that the National Park don't offer any exciting activities for young people, and any fun activities they want to do can't be done because barriers. Then I asked them what gets in the way of them visiting the National Parks. Some of their barriers with accessing the National Parks reminded me of personal problems that I needed to overcome to engage with the Lake District and other National Parks. Barriers they shared with me were;

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN THE NATIONAL PARKS

Transport to and from the National Parks for young people who don't drive can be a big challenge. "A 2005 visitor survey on how visitors travelled to the Peak District found that 85% (eight and a half million visitors) used a car as a mean of transport to get into the Peak District National Park, whereas 2% (two hundred thousand visitors) used bus or train." (Peak District National Park Authority: Fact sheet 5) for young people who don't drive this can reduce accessibility, but also using public transport to get to the National Parks can be a struggle. "Currently a lack of public transport prevents many people from visiting these key national assets." (Environment Audit Committee, 2012)

Money itself can hold a young person back from engaging in the National Park. It costs to travel, to stay places, to eat, do fun activities and to live. "Young adults aged 18 to 24 are less comfortable with their finances than younger teenagers, probably reflecting the challenges of greater financial independence." (Money Advice Service, 2014) Growing up during a financial recession has had an impact on young people and their attitudes toward money.

Some mentioned that before they became a Mosaic champion, they had no idea the National park existed or what a National Park was. This lack of knowledge and awareness can be a serious problem for youth engagement. Because if they go into the National Park in the future, they will have had no experience of how to look after and conserve the National Park so they could potentially damage or even break the law in the National Park.

Following up from the section about being ethical towards young people; being knocked back is one of the biggest issues for them. Not being accepted into something because of lack of knowledge, trust, experience or skill can make it difficult for them to make friends, try new things and involve themselves. One young Champion said: "We are timid like foxes. If you scare us away, we won't come back." This was referring to bad experiences on an event with the National Park that could have been caused by not being involved directly from rangers and instead receiving "cold" feelings from them.

Many of the champions had organised their own events to get other young people into the National Parks, and from some of their experiences the said young people can be: lazy, un-enthusiastic, apathetic, lacking motivation, bad communication skills and say that they're going to come to the event but on the day cancel or not show up. This can be from timing commitments with school, college or work. And also because young people my lack confidence, experience, not have the gear or equipment.

Other barriers that get in the way for young people include things such as disabilities, fears, being stereotyped and 'demonised' by the media as explain a BBC report: "Nearly 750 young people completed an online poll for the British Youth Council (BYC) Eighty per cent believed unfair portrayal in the media led to strained relations with older generations." (BBC NEWS, 2006)

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN THE NATIONAL PARKS

Some of them had been Mosaic Champions for a long time and I asked them what they had gained from the National Parks. According to Krueger and Casey: “Open-ended questions are a hallmark of focus group interviewing.” (Krueger & Casey, 2000) With this in mind I knew they would each have lots of positive experiences to share, but I also considered their theory that: “In general, you reduce clarity as the length of the question increases.” (Krueger & Casey, 2000) So I was cautious not to allow everyone to get side tracked and made sure I let each champion to speak in turn.

Finally I personally asked each of them how they think would make the National Parks more attractive for young people to engage in. Krueger and Casey would argue “Decisions are made after all the focus groups are completed, not in individual groups.” (Krueger & Casey, 2000) Therefore this answer is a key part of the focus group that builds the foundations for the summary and ideas to help deal with the issue, but is not considered the entire solution.



YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN THE NATIONAL PARKS

Internal Focus Group

The second focus group was internal with staff, authority members and volunteers at the Lake District National Park Authority (Murley Moss, Kendal). "The focus group is characterized by homogeneity, but with sufficient variation among participants to allow for contrasting opinions. Most commonly, homogeneity is sought in terms of occupation, social class, educational level, age, education, or family characteristics." (Krueger, 1988) Because I would have six stakeholders for this focus group I made sure they were from different roles in the Lake District National Park, so with diversity in stakeholders I can gain a contrast in opinions.

When I was deciding the questions to ask my internal focus group, I kept some of Krueger's theories in mind: "Forethought must be given to developing questions for a focus group. Questions are the heart of the focus group interview." (Krueger, 1988) The questions were decided upon potential answers that could further help research in the report and lead to suggestions for a solution to the issue.

"Dichotomous questions seem appealing because they are so simple, easy to ask, and familiar in social situations. Researchers should use them with caution, however. In focus group interviews, the yes-no questions usually does not evoke the desired group discussion." (Krueger, 1988) Because of this, clarity was needed to keep the focus group focused but allowing the questions to open up avenues for new ideas and possible recommendations: "These open-ended questions provide an opportunity for the respondent to answer from a variety of dimensions." (Krueger, 1988)

I asked how do they think young people feel about visiting the National Park, Why are young people important in the National Park, and what do they do? These questions were quickly echoed for me to answer for my personal views as a young person, but I gave quotes from my external focus group with young people and told them what they thought of the traditional National Park crowd. "Staff at the National Park (rangers) can feel intimidating." Not something they were expecting, but turned around by more positive quotes: "This (Mosaic project) has opened up so many doors for me, and so many opportunities for us (young people)." "My decisions going to study at university have been heavily influenced by the mosaic project and my local National Park."

What are the National Park currently doing to engage young people and what are the possibilities to further engage young people? They explained that the young ranger's project and Brockhole visitors centre are focused towards young people. While The Lake District visitor centre is mainly aimed at young teenagers and children on school trips, the young rangers is aimed for 14 to 18 year olds. This reduces engagement from young people aged between 18 and 25, and it doesn't tackle the issue of engaging young people.

I finalised the internal focus group with the question: "What is the future for the National Parks without young people?" to press the impact of this issue upon them in the long run.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN THE NATIONAL PARKS

Summary for the Stakeholders

The findings from primary research focus groups has helped with some personal suggestions and recommendations to increase youth engagement in the National Parks;

Being more interactive with young people by speaking their language. I don't mean using slang terms, instead I mean going viral. It was discussed on the BBC if people could vote in the upcoming election via the internet they would have so many more young voters: "Instead of queuing up at the local school or village hall to use a pen and paper, there are claims more people would vote if they could simply make the choice via the internet." (Dawson, 2015) This would be similar with youth engagement in the National Park.

If the National Parks were more interactive with media and information about upcoming events, history, jobs, things to do etcetera on the internet using websites such as Facebook and Twitter but focus the target audience as young people. Web pages that are designed for young people, because Young people take in and also access information differently to an older generation. For example a young person asking someone who owns a house during the 70's "what is the first thing you do with a new house?" and they reply "establish where the candles will be kept." This is because during the 70's there were many power cuts from worker strikes so they needed easy access to the candles in the dark, but a young person wouldn't think of that because they have lived in a different environment . So the information needs to be understandable for them.

Training staff within the National Parks who will be engaging young people. Youth proofing the organisation so young people will feel welcomed by the staff and they won't be put off or intimidated. "We believe that now more than ever young people need youth workers. Youth workers dedicate their time and expertise to helping young people in their personal and social development, equipping them with the practical skills they need to be resilient in challenging times, and positive contributors to future economic growth." (National Youth Agency, 2015) With that in mind, if specific staff that interact with youth are trained similar to youth workers then they will be able to mentor young people and personally engage with them more effectively.

Partner up with youth oriented organisations that will help engage youth in the National Parks through fun activities, but having a cross over so staff from the National Park go and teach the young people about the park and opportunities on offer. "As an influential organisation, the UK Youth Parliament, under the guidance of British Youth Council, is showing how robust it can be in representing young people." (Carter, 2015) There are many youth focused organisation who promote and network young people to get them involved and have their voice heard, this might also provide opportunity to apply for greater funding.

Jobs fairs at colleges and clubs to promote active engagement with the National Park. Going to them directly where young people will be, is an effective method to engage and should be used more regularly. "Direct recruitment paying off for young learners." (Lewis, 2015) groups such as the Duke of Edinburgh use

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN THE NATIONAL PARKS

this method at schools and colleges, but to further attract more young people the National Park could raise awareness and engage youth at gigs, youth clubs, town events and festivals.

Better communication with young people to keep them feeling involved. During events and not during events by being friendly and open with young people, it will help them feel more welcomed. Not talking to them like they are children, but talking to them with dignity and how you would want to be spoken to. Keeping in touch with them, reminding them about upcoming events, asking how they have been, if they have visited the National Park lately and recommending some good places to go in the National Park.

Lift sharing to events with staff/volunteers to events. This will help young people overcome the transportation barrier and also build friendly relationships between staff/volunteers and young people, as well as promoting a cleaner environment through less car emissions too.

Work with inspirational people to empower and promote youth activities in the National Park. A good example of an inspirational figure is Alastair Humphreys. Alastair is an adventurer, author, motivational speaker, and National Geographic adventurer of the year.

“I believe that young people benefit from outdoor, adventurous activities such as climbing, canoeing, sailing, mountain biking. That these activities can help produce healthier, more confident, more employable citizens.” (Humphreys, 2014)




Alastair promotes adventuring to people in order to push them to the best of their ability, so he came up with the idea of micro adventures: “Simple expeditions and challenges which are close to home, affordable and easy to organise.” Using this idea to inspire young people to go into the National Parks with help from Alastair Humphreys and other inspirational people, this would give a lasting positive experience for young people, the National Park and the inspirational person. (An example of Humphrey’s infographic on Micro adventures on the right).

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YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN THE NATIONAL PARKS

Contact Information

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|  A young man with a mohawk hairstyle, wearing a leather jacket and a chain necklace, smiling. |  A woman with dark hair pulled back, wearing a grey top and a colorful patterned scarf, smiling. |  A woman with dark hair, wearing a dark jacket over a pink top, smiling. |
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YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN THE NATIONAL PARKS

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