Lighting the Fire: Empowering Youth Towards Sustainability in Nature Camps

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Abstract:
The scale of the sustainability crisis is mounting exponentially as human development pushes the socio-ecological system closer to its limits. 12 to 18 year olds, who are in a formative life stage, are critical stakeholders in the success of addressing this sustainability challenge. This study explores the role of nature camps as powerful platforms for empowering young people towards sustainability. It begins by creating a conceptual framework to identify, define and design youth empowerment towards sustainability (YES). This is then used to identify relevant current practices and activities in the field through qualitative interviews with nature camp practitioners. A focus group is held to trial the YES Framework and collect suggestions for designing camps. Through thematic analysis, five key themes are distilled which link outcomes of camps to addressing specific sustainability issues. The study concludes that nature camps already empower young people towards sustainability, though neither explicitly nor strategically. Based on these findings we see an excellent opportunity to bring together existing knowledge from the field, combined with the YES Framework, to support the creation of nature camps which can empower new generations of young people to engage in strategic sustainable development.

Keywords:
Youth Empowerment, Strategic Sustainable Development, Nature Camps, Nature Connection, Sustainability
Statement of Contribution

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Our team coalesced around a shared belief that youth can influence and reimagine society, and in the wisdom of nature as a teacher. This common drive has offered constant inspiration for the research and fanned our faith in its practical application and relevance to society.

As a group we upheld the image of an equilateral triangle, representing balance and resilience to turbulence. Our team was characterised by dedication, hard work, and trust in each other’s capabilities and goodwill. Our intention from the beginning was to make this an experiential process, fitting with such a soulful topic. This allowed for a distinctly human experience, with many moments shared over laptops as well as delicious food and grass at our feet. All three of us brought a high level of consciousness and care for group dynamics. From our first dragon dreaming session; through weekly breakfast check-ins to plan the week ahead; regular feedback sessions to reflect on our roles as team members and researchers; to our tradition of gratitude beads, gleaned from our research, to see us through the last month of toil.

Kilia’s naturally calming presence helped ground the team and keep us on track. Her eagle perspective and critical questions kept the team sharp and ensured a logical flow of the research design and report. She was the ultimate host, lavishing the group with tea and treats. She worked on her personal goal of renewing and maintaining her energy, and in doing so supported the whole team to sustain energy levels.

Stéphanie’s analytical mind and visualisation skills have been valuable sense-making assets, especially during strategic interventions she facilitated such as the framework design session and ‘sort-ourselves-out day’. As a gifted writer with a passion for research methods, she ensured an academically rigorous and colourful report. Her passion for the topic and team process helped us remember our shared dreams and live into them.

Brendan was the nexus between our research and the field, and made the research possible by generously offering his network. He spearheaded the original topic proposal, the focus group at the Initiative Forum, and the creation of a guidebook, which will follow on from the research as a resource for practitioners. As a native speaker with excellent writing skills, he often went the extra mile to enrich the report with nuance and precision.

Throughout, we have made use of each other’s strengths while also creating opportunities to practice and learn new skills. We shared tasks such as writing, transcribing and interviewing, striving for equal ownership during every stage of the research. Overall it has been a joyful and nourishing process and we each take away the precious memory of working in a high performing team built on equal efforts, mutual respect, and shared passion.
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Finally, thank you to all the people who make the Masters in Strategic Leadership towards Sustainability programme possible. Without you we would not have had this opportunity for deep and transformative learning. We have become woven into a bigger story and we are grateful for our opportunity to play a role in its success.
Executive Summary

Introduction

The speed and scale of human development is pushing Earth’s systems to the brink of climate and societal collapse. Increasing awareness of this global sustainability challenge and society’s unsustainable course resulted in the field of sustainable development. Planning for sustainable development in a complex and constantly changing environment requires a forward-thinking and adaptive approach. One such approach is Strategic Sustainable Development (SSD). The SSD approach illustrates the urgency of the global sustainability challenge with the metaphor of a funnel, its closing walls represent the decreasing capacity of the ecological and social systems to support society’s disproportionate and systematically increasing demands. SSD identifies eight sustainability principles, which can serve as boundary conditions within which society must function in order to be sustainable.

Young people, who represent the future of our world, can play a crucial role in shifting society on a sustainable course. In this research, we refer to youth as people between the age of 12 to 18, also known as adolescents. Two main reasons for involving this age group are: Firstly, that they are in a crucial developmental stage, where worldviews, values and behaviours are shaped for later life. Secondly, as inheritors of our currently unsustainable society, youth will live with the consequences the longest.

On a global scale, youth feel excluded from decision making, leading to a sense of disempowerment, which hinders them from engaging with wider issues such as sustainability. This study focuses on the phenomenon of empowerment to enable a young person to participate in the sustainability movement. Empowerment, as defined by Zimmerman, is both the process and outcome of individuals gaining mastery of their lives, characterised by a sense of control, critical awareness, and community involvement. Non-formal education may play a role in empowering youth towards sustainability, as it takes participatory and emancipatory approaches known to be empowering. One example are nature camps, which bring young people together in immersive multiple-night overstays in remote natural settings.

Our hypothesis is that these nature camps are powerful platforms for empowering youth towards sustainability, even if they don’t explicitly take a strategic approach to sustainability. Two reasons for this assumption are that these camps are settings of proactive group living and focus on building nature connection. Studies show that both elements can build capacities to positively address social and environmental sustainability issues.

Existing literature is lacking a clear definition for youth empowerment towards sustainability based on the age group identified here and an SSD understanding of sustainability. There is also a gap in the literature on the connection between empowering young people towards sustainability and the potential of nature camps to cultivate this empowerment. This therefore leads to the research question:

How can nature camps empower youth towards sustainability?
Methods

To answer this research question, a combined approach based on Maxwell’s interactive methodology, action research, and discursive qualitative methods were chosen, and the following three research phases were executed:

**Phase 1:** Developed the YES Framework, which can be used to define, identify and design for youth empowerment towards sustainability. This conceptual framework, which was shortened to the ‘YES Framework’, was developed in a two-day design session and incorporates the elements of youth aged 12 to 18, Zimmerman’s three component psychological empowerment model, and an SSD understanding of sustainability.

**Phase 2a:** Used the YES Framework to identify how existing nature camps empower youth towards sustainability. Eleven semi-structured in-depth interviews with practitioners from four different UK-based nature camps were conducted. The questions were guided by the layers of the Framework. The results were analysed to identify relevant practices and activities for enabling the empowerment process. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded using a mixed method of a priori and open coding.

**Phase 2b:** Trialled the relevance, validity, and usability of the YES Framework for its intended audience: nature camp practitioners from the field. The framework was trialled as a tool for designing an ideal nature camp for empowering youth towards sustainability. Twenty practitioners from the international field of nature camps participated in a focus group, bringing in a rich mix of experience and expertise.

**Phase 3:** A thematic analysis was carried out to re-categorise and interpret results from phases 2a and 2b into five themes. This was done to show how the skills and capacities developed through relevant practices and activities at camp can enable youth to address specific sustainability issues in a wider societal context.

Results

A summary of key results from each research phase is presented below:

**Phase 1** resulted in a conceptual framework for youth empowerment towards sustainability. The YES Framework defined youth empowerment towards sustainability, summarised in short as:

*The process by which certain skills and capacities are cultivated in young people aged 12 to 18 to bring them to a point of being ready to act on environmental and social sustainability issues relevant to them, helping to shift society onto a sustainable course.*

The YES Framework further details (1) the skills and capacities that must be cultivated, (2) the process through which this takes place, and (3) the container defined by the relevant stakeholders and environment conditions that facilitate the empowerment process. These will henceforth be referred to as the ‘layers’ of the YES Framework. The framework is represented visually on the following page:
The YES Framework

**Phase 2a:** Through interviews with practitioners, current practices and activities were identified that empower youth towards sustainability. Through an a priori coding process, the rich data was shown to span all layers of the YES Framework, demonstrating there is already a wealth of relevant knowledge and experience in the field of nature camps.

Besides this, a number of open codes, aspects not considered in the YES Framework, were identified. These were: *cultural considerations*, *financial disempowerment* as a structural obstacle to engaging with sustainability; giving youth *autonomy* over decision making, and *returning* multiple times to build empowerment through repeated experience. These findings from the field highlight gaps in the theory and provide input for an iteration on the YES Framework.

**Phase 2b:** Outcomes of this phase were two-fold. Firstly, hosting a focus group of practitioners provided an opportunity to trial the YES Framework and gain feedback on the relevance and validity of the research. Through observation, implicit feedback on the usability of the YES Framework itself was attained. Furthermore, the engagement and enthusiasm of the focus group participants confirmed the relevance of the research to the field.

Additionally, suggestions for designing an ideal nature camp for empowerment towards sustainability were received. These included recommendations for the length of camp, the stakeholders that ought to be involved, process considerations, and practices and activities to draw the necessary outcomes.

**Phase 3:** Five key outcomes of nature camps for addressing specific sustainability issues on a societal level were distilled. These outcomes could be useful for funders or policy makers, to demonstrate the positive societal impact of nature camps. The research finds potential for nature camps to:
1. Build personal resilience and positive mental strength to overcome difficulty and maintain a healthy lifestyle, in response to the prevalence of mental illness, depression and suicide amongst youth;

2. Cultivate engagement in society with a sense of purpose and meaningful connection with sustainability issues that they can affect, counteracting the widespread apathy regarding the sustainability challenge;

3. Foster authenticity to enhance the quality of relationships to achieve genuine and positive connection to others, in response to the ‘epidemic of loneliness’ and breakdown of families and communities;

4. Practice tolerance and understanding of others, to build cooperation and equality towards a more peaceful and just world, in response to trends of polarisation and ‘othering’ in increasingly heterogeneous societies;

5. Instil nature connection through direct experience, increasing the awareness of human impact and internalising a sense of care and appreciation for nature, in response to society’s disconnected and abusive relationship with the natural world.

Discussion

The research question How can nature camps empower youth towards sustainability? is answered through summarisation of the findings in the form of guidelines for practitioners.

Firstly, five relevant societal outcomes of nature camps were identified in research phase 3, which describe the response empowered young people might give to addressing wider sustainability issues. These can be useful for engaging funders and policy makers.

For the individual level, the YES Framework was developed in research phase 1 to enable practitioners to design camps specifically to empower youth towards sustainability. The Framework identifies four main skills and capacities necessary to develop within the young person, as well as the process phases and conditions necessary to facilitate this process.

Finally practices and activities relevant for building these skills and capacities were identified in phases 2a and 2b. Key examples included lighting a fire, reflecting in a heart circle and rite of passage night vigils. These provide practical guidance for how nature camps can empower youth towards sustainability.

Relevance of the study

Our hypothesis that nature camps already empower youth towards sustainability was justified, on account that all fields of the YES Framework were populated with results. However the results were collected from multiple camps, suggesting there is potential for shared learning and improvement within the field. Furthermore, the study proposes that the YES Framework, which itself draws on SSD theory, be used to design programmes that take a more strategic approach. By drawing explicit connections to wider sustainability issues and ways nature camps can help address them, the study further highlights avenues for contributing to strategic sustainable development.

Limitations, validity and suggestions for future research

The YES Framework is a first prototype theoretical model, used at once as a filter to collect and analyse data, whilst simultaneously being tested for its validity. Results from the field
provide insights for how the theoretical model could be improved. Points for improvement might include: 1) Further exploration of the process layer, which yielded less results than other layers. 2) Incorporation of open codes, and 3) integration of the wider societal sustainability outcomes into the framework. Since these would bring findings from practice into a theoretical model, future research would be needed to test the internal validity of an expanded framework.

A strong correlation between care for the natural world and people, and pro-environmental and pro-social behaviour respectively, was discussed in the literature and echoed by the research. We therefore question to what extent nature camps need to mention SSD, or even sustainability, explicitly with young people to achieve the same empowered outcomes. Arguably, it is enough for nature camps to focus on instilling nature connection and fostering community with a diverse tribe of peers and staff, in order to build the care that will, downstream, lead to empowered individuals who act towards sustainability. Future research could explore this hypothesis, in the form of a longitudinal comparative study between nature camps with and without an explicit mention of sustainability.

The absence of youth’s perspectives in this research raise ethical considerations regarding the credibility and integrity of designing programmes ‘for’ youth empowerment without young people’s contributions. We strove to counterbalance this limitation by grounding our research in literature and frameworks tested and validated in practice, and working with experienced practitioners, who were also the intended audience of this report. We suggest future research seek out youth participants’ perspectives. This could involve discursive qualitative research, a large scale survey, a longitudinal study, or analysing impact reports from organisations where available.

This research and the YES Framework were based on Western-centric literature and frameworks, and a Western-oriented work context of most of the practitioners we engaged. While this ensured the validity of the research and framework within a Western context, its transferability should not be assumed beyond a Western context. Future research engaging practitioners working outside of this region might modify and validate the YES Framework for its wider relevance and applicability.

**Conclusion**

This study explored the question: *How can nature camps empower youth towards sustainability?* In order to answer it, the YES Framework was developed, relevant practices and activities were collected from the field, and connections to societal sustainability issues were drawn through thematic analysis. These findings, presented as guidelines, can be used by practitioners in the field of nature camps to design programmes that effectively empower young people towards sustainability. If maximised, these nature camps have the ability to inform life-long sustainable values and behaviour within young people, who can help society chart its sustainable course.
Glossary

Conceptual Framework: Can be described as the current version of the researcher’s map of the territory being investigated.

Empowerment: Includes the empowerment process, where people experience having influence on the decisions that affect their life, as well as their measurable outcomes. The three component model of Zimmerman dissects empowerment into a sense of control (intrapersonal component), critical awareness of the socio-political environment (interactional component), and community involvement (behavioural component).

EYE for Sustainability Learning Tool: A learning tool, developed by Valentina Tassone, which aims to foster empowerment for sustainability. The tool has been developed within the context of a Dutch university course called ‘Empowerment for Sustainability’ and outlines a process which empowers students to address sustainability-related issues.

Funnel Metaphor: Illustrates the urgency of the global sustainability challenge. The closing funnel walls represent the decreasing capacity of the ecological and social systems to support society’s disproportionate and systematically increasing demands.

MSLS Spiral Learning Process: This framework details the pedagogical approaches and learning objectives of the Master’s Program in Strategic Leadership towards Sustainability at the Blekinge Tekniska Högskola, Sweden and addresses building individual capacity for Strategic Sustainable Development.

Nature Camps: Non-formal programmes that bring young people together in immersive multiple-night overstays in nature.

PYE Creative Community Model: The Creative Community Model of PYE (Partners for Youth Empowerment) guides the design and facilitation of creative, arts-based youth empowerment programmes, including nature camps, for young people aged 12 to 18.

Sustainability Challenge: Human development is systematically and increasingly pushing the natural world beyond its means to sustain life indefinitely. Realigning society’s trajectory to be within the system boundaries of the planet, forms the global sustainability challenge.

Sustainability Principles: Eight principles which serve as boundary conditions within which society must function in order to be sustainable. These state that in a sustainable society, nature is not subject to systematically increasing (1) concentrations of substances extracted from the earth’s crust, (2) concentrations of substances produced by society, and (3) degradation by physical means. In addition, people are not subject to structural obstacles to: (4) health, (5) influence, (6) competence, (7) impartiality, and (8) meaning-making.

Youth Empowerment towards Sustainability: The process by which certain skills and capacities are cultivated in young people aged 12 to 18 to bring them to a point of being ready to act on environmental and social sustainability issues relevant to them, helping to shift society onto a sustainable course.

Youth: For this research youth are defined as young people between the age of 12 to 18, known in developmental psychology as adolescence.
List of Abbreviations

**EYE**: Educating Yourself in Empowerment Learning Tool

**MSLS**: Master’s in Strategic Leadership towards Sustainability

**PYE**: Partners for Youth Empowerment

**SSD**: Strategic Sustainable Development

**YES Framework**: Framework for Youth Empowerment towards Sustainability
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1 Introduction

Four point eight billion years of evolution have culminated in the Anthropocene. Those born into this era inherit the responsibility for the future potential for all life on planet Earth. It is a tall order for today’s youth, who inherit the bounty and perils of modern existence. The enduring story will be their ability to navigate society successfully towards sustainability. In pursuit of this goal, only empowered change-makers will be able to reconcile our future fate with the challenges of today.

1.1 Today’s Sustainability Challenges

Human development has detached from the capacity of the natural world to the extent that we are now living beyond its means to sustain human life indefinitely (Steffen et al. 2011; Rockström 2009). This dominating influence over our natural environment has led to the dawn of a new geological epoch, termed the ‘Anthropocene’ (Zalasiewicz 2011). Last year marked the planet’s first-ever year with a continuous atmospheric CO2 concentration above the symbolic 400 parts per million milestone (Kahn 2016). This is largely due to fossil fuel combustion which has, amongst other things, contributed to the Arctic ice cap shrinking visibly year by year, heating the Earth and distorting the world’s climate systems (IPCC 2013; NASA 2016). Deforestation is occurring at the rate of 48 football pitches per minute according to WWF (2016). We are losing species at a rate that classifies as mass extinction, with another 52% of the species halving their population in the last forty years. This dramatic decay in the planet’s biodiversity greatly reduces its resilience, according to Ceballos et al. (2015), who suggest the window to address such challenges is closing rapidly.

Alongside the diminishing capacities of the ecological system there are many occurring violations upon our social system, which further illustrate society’s unsustainable course. A surge of social isolation and disconnection has led to what has been dubbed the ‘epidemic of loneliness’ (Cacioppo and Patrick 2008). Increased global prevalence of mental illness, depression and suicide is also observed (Hidaka 2012; Whiteford et al. 2013; World Health Organization 2001). Furthermore an increase in the numbers of family units breaking down and domestic violence have been reported (United Nations 2003; United Nations 2015a). We are witnessing the highest levels of forced displacement on record, according to the UNHCR (2015), the consequence of wars and great social upheaval in some parts of the world, and a cause for polarising public opinion on immigration in others (Wike et al. 2016). The extreme degree of human-driven devastation of our planet and societies can be paralysing for some. Apathy and climate denial are common coping strategies, but do nothing to make the global sustainability challenge go away (O’Neill and Nicholson-Cole 2009; Running 2007). In response to these challenges society must find approaches that enable development without degrading the quality of social and ecological systems.

Awareness of society’s unsustainable course resulted in the field of sustainable development (Barth and Michelsen 2013, 103). One of the most used definitions, known as the Brundtland definition, states that “sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987). Framing future generations as a central motivation for sustainable development can be traced back to indigenous origins,
such as the centuries-old Great Law of Peace of the Iroquois Confederacy, which states that in our every deliberation, we have to consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations.

1.2 Strategic Sustainable Development

The definitions above describe an ideal intention for sustainable development. They do not however, provide instructions for planning for sustainable development (Broman and Robèrt 2017). This requires a forward-thinking and adaptive approach in the unpredictable complexity of our world. One such approach is Strategic Sustainable Development (SSD). The SSD approach stipulates eight sustainability principles as boundary conditions within which society must function in order to be sustainable. These state that, “In a sustainable society, nature is not subject to systematically increasing (1) concentrations of substances extracted from the earth’s crust, (2) concentrations of substances produced by society, and (3) degradation by physical means. In addition, people are not subject to structural obstacles to (4) health, (5) influence, (6) competence, (7) impartiality, and (8) meaning-making” (Broman and Robèrt 2017, 23; Holmberg and Robèrt 2000).

The SSD approach illustrates the urgency of the global sustainability challenge with the metaphor of a funnel, its closing walls representing the decreasing capacity of the ecological and social systems to support society’s disproportionate and systematically increasing demands (Broman and Robèrt 2017, 21). This highlights misalignment with the sustainability principles on a global scale. SSD strives to resolve the “unsustainable basic design and mode of operation of society”, meaning no more violation of the principles, at which point the metaphorical funnel would level out into a cylinder (ibid.).

1.3 Involving Young People

This research focuses on engaging youth with SSD. For the purposes of this research, we define youth and young people as the age group of 12 to 18, known in developmental psychology as adolescence. Youth are a critical stakeholder group in efforts to move towards a sustainable society for two main reasons:

Firstly, as inheritors of currently unsustainable societies, youth will live with the consequences longest (Narksompong 2015; United Nations 2003; United Nations Development Programme 2014). Young people and children are particularly vulnerable to human-induced environmental risks (United Nations 2003, 133). Many are experiencing social challenges as well, having “their potential hindered by extreme poverty, discrimination or lack of information” (United Nations 2015b). This makes youth key stakeholders in the environmental and social predicament of our world (United Nations 2003, 2). Mass mobilisation for a cultural shift on all layers of global society is required to turn the tide of our unsustainable course, and, as Riemer reminds us, “youth and young adults have often played a key role in creating such significant cultural shifts” (Riemer et al. 2014, 569).

Secondly, adolescence is a formative life stage. Since the inception of its formal study, this developmental stage has been characterised as one of inner turmoil and confusion (Blythe and Harré 2012; Hall 1904; Morton and Montgomery 2012). It is a time of identity development,
where worldviews, values, and attitudes are explored (Kroger 2004). These are formed under heavy influence of the social environment (ibid.) and are often sustained throughout their lives (Riemer et al. 2014, 555). For this reason, as Riemer and colleagues argue, “it is important that young people come to see themselves as active participants in their society and communities” (ibid.).

### 1.4 Empowerment, the Psychology

Becoming engaged with sustainability issues requires an awareness of existing systems and a belief in the ability to influence those systems. In short, it requires empowerment. For the purposes of this research, we will use the most widely accepted, psychological definition of empowerment. In the early eighties, community psychologist Rappaport introduced the term empowerment, defining it as “the mechanism by which people, organisations, and communities gain mastery over their lives” (Rappaport 1984, 3). Empowerment on the individual level of analysis is closely linked to self-efficacy, which is the fundamental belief that one’s actions have the power to effect change (Bandura 1982; Tassone et al. 2017, 5). The work of Marc Zimmerman in particular has further validated empowerment as a psychological construct. He distinguishes between empowering processes and empowered outcomes. The former are defined as series of experiences that provide people with opportunities to control decisions that will affect their lives (Zimmerman 1995, 583). Empowered outcomes are the (measurable) consequences of such experiences (ibid., 585). Zimmerman dissects psychological empowerment into (1) a sense of control (intrapersonal component), (2) critical awareness of the socio-political environment (interactional component), and (3) community involvement (behavioural component) (ibid., 588). In other words, “those who feel personally empowered to effect change, who feel that they can make a difference, and know how to do so,” are the ones who act (Schreiner et al. 2005, 7). When considering empowerment in relation to sustainability, several theories, frameworks, and interventions use this three component model as their definition of empowerment (for example: Riemer et al. 2014; Tassone et al. 2017; Miguel et al. 2015).

### 1.5 Empowering Youth towards Sustainability

Currently, youth on aggregate experience a sense of disempowerment both in the public and private domain. The ‘future pessimism’ young people commonly experience leads to feelings of hopelessness, and a belief that the continuation and worsening of global problems lie outside their influence (Schreiner et al. 2005, 19 and 36; Hicks and Holden 1995, 21). The Youth Strategy 2014-2017 of the UNDP revealed that on a global scale, young people feel excluded from taking part in formal decision making processes in a meaningful way (United Nations Development Programmes 2014, 18). While globally voter ratings are low for youth who have reached the legal voting age (ibid., 19), the age group this research focuses on are excluded from voting altogether. The lack of youth civic engagement is also shown by the underrepresentation of youth in political processes and institutions (ibid., 17). While young people believe that environmental protection should be high on the political agenda, their disempowerment hinders them from engaging with these issues in the public domain (Hicks and Holden 1995, 42). Therefore, youth need to be empowered to ensure their engagement in issues relating to sustainability.
In their private lives, many youth reportedly feel that school fails to equip them with coping strategies to face society’s challenges (Hicks and Holden 1995). Non-formal education can therefore play a role in complementing formal education, as the ‘participatory’ and ‘emancipatory’ approaches they often take are known to be empowering (Riemer et al. 2014, 556; Tassone et al. 2017, 3). Non-formal education is learning that occurs as a result of both the individual’s initiative and more structured, organised activities that can have learning objectives (OECD 2016). Riemer and colleagues found that many youth became engaged through participation in non-formal environmental programmes and state there is a “growing need for the development of more effective environmental programmes and sustainability initiatives that engage youth in environmental actions outside of the classroom” (Riemer et al. 2014, 556).

1.6 The Potential of Nature Camps

Nature camps are non-formal programmes that bring young people together in immersive multiple-night overstays in remote natural settings (Garst et al. 2011, 76-77). These nature camps don’t usually take a Zimmerman-informed empowerment approach, nor explicitly mention sustainability or with a strategic understanding like SSD provides. Still, it is our hypothesis that these nature camps are powerful platforms for empowering youth towards sustainability. Two core aspects of nature camps build the case for this assumption.

Proactive group living

Firstly, the immersive social settings of nature camps arguably positively address social sustainability issues. Garst and colleagues write that “at camp, children experience just about all aspects of their lives – eating, sleeping, playing, and working – in social groups” (Garst et al. 2011, 77). Observed outcomes as a result of positive social relationships both with peers and adult staff, are the development of social skills, as well as increased confidence, self-esteem, and self-efficacy (Rose-Krasnor 2009; Garst et al. 2011; Morton and Montgomery 2013; Riemer et al, 2014). From an SSD perspective, these outcomes can be seen as providing respite to structural obstacles to (mental) health in society (sustainability principle 4). Community identity is reinforced through rituals and traditions, which allow for meaningful involvement of the youth participant. Campfires for example are said to “foster personal reflection” and “become symbolic and foundational to the construction of shared memories” (Garst et al. 2011, 79). From an SSD perspective, this can be seen lifting the structural obstacles to meaning-making prevalent in society (sustainability principle 8). Youth ascribe importance to active participation, wanting to feel respected, and having a sense of control over programme content. These components are noted as being imperative to achieving youth engagement (MacKinnon et al. 2007; Riemer et al. 2014, 560). Nature camps promote this active participation through participatory learning, critical thinking, and co-decision making by the youth at camp (Riemer et al. 2014, 556-560). In doing so, they “instill a sense of social responsibility in youth that will sustain into adulthood” (Riemer et al. 2014, 555). From an SSD perspective, the promotion of active participation can be seen as removing structural obstacles to influence (sustainability principle 5).
Nature Connection

Secondly, the focus on nature connection in nature camps can conceivably support the engagement of youth in environmental sustainability issues. Apart from the well-documented physical and mental health benefits of regular exposure to the natural world (Kaplan 1995; Garst et al. 2011), some say humans have an inborn propensity for a positive affective connection to nature, or simply ‘nature connection’ (Wilson 1984; Kahn 1997; Hinds and Sparks 2008). This strand of literature has made the case for an inherent affiliation to the natural world due to our long evolutionary trajectory as part of it (Wilson 1984). This ‘biophilia’, however, may atrophy when individuals are underexposed to nature (Hinds and Sparks 2008, 110; Kahn, 1997). Our modern predominantly indoor and technology-centered lifestyles have as such led to apathy and a disinterest in the natural world and its current plight (Hinds and Sparks 2008, 109; United Nations 2003, 313).

Nature camps often follow this rationale. By deliberately providing nature-based sensory experiences such as exploring a forest, they hope to lay the groundwork for attitudes and values driving pro-environmental behaviour in later life (Arnold et al. 2009; Garst et al. 2011, 77; Riemer et al. 2014, 559). Empirical research supports this reasoning by demonstrating a strong correlation between nature connection and pro-environmental behaviour (e.g. Schultz 2002; Hinds and Sparks 2008, 110; Browne et al. 2011, 71). In an interview-based study on significant life experiences with young environmental leaders, ‘time spent in nature’ was mentioned in every interview as a formative influence, for example in the form of “an intense immersion experience in the natural world or outdoor camp program” (Arnold et al. 2009, 32). Nature camps are thus seen as a means to “engage [youth] in environmental sustainability efforts in their homes and communities”, according to Browne et al. (2011, 71). In addition to a ‘generalised’ nature connection, a ‘sense of place’ where people feel an emotional connection with a particular place is also a predictive factor in pro-environmental attitudes and behaviour (Hinds and Sparks 2008, 110; Riemer et al. 2014, 569).

1.7 Research Question

Youth are identified as key stakeholders within the sustainability challenge, though are currently widely disempowered from playing an active role in addressing it. Through extensive review of related literature, we have identified two gaps we are inspired to explore further:

1. While the literature discusses the current state of youth and sustainability engagement, we found no definition of ‘youth empowerment towards sustainability.’
2. The connection between youth empowerment towards sustainability and the potential of nature camps as powerful platforms for cultivating this empowerment.

This leads us to the research question that will guide this research:

How can nature camps empower youth towards sustainability?
2 Overall Research Design

This study has followed a multi-phase research design. Below we present the overview of this design.

2.1 Research Purpose, Question and Scope

Given the potential we see in nature camps for empowering youth towards sustainability, the purpose of this study is to help nature camps improve their practice of this process. This was intended to be done by gathering and organising the knowledge already present in the field,
and with our expertise of Strategic Sustainable Development, make suggestions for further developing this potential. The primary audience of this study, consequently, are practitioners in the field of nature camps, interested in improving their practice.

The research question *How can nature camps empower youth towards sustainability?* was derived from this purpose.

This research was scoped to practitioners in the field of nature camps in the non-formal educational sector, working with 12 to 18 year olds. This therefore excludes (1) the formal educational sector and conventional youth and social work, (2) non-nature-based youth (empowerment) programmes, (4) camps catering to different age groups, (5) positive outcomes in youth participants not related to the concept of youth empowerment towards sustainability, and (6) young people as research participants. In addition, we scoped the main data collection (phase 2a) to practitioners and camps based in the UK. The limitations and validity of this scope are discussed in Phase 2a Methods, as well as in the Discussion section 8.3.

### 2.2 Research Approach and Methods

Given our affinity with the topic, we were inspired by action research as an approach which “at its heart is about changing and improving practice and understanding of practice through a combination of systematic reflection and strategic innovation” (Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013, 245). Action research is usually conducted through iterative cycles of action and reflection, and collaboration between researchers and practitioners (Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013). Though limited by time constraints and distance, we strove to collaborate with practitioners where possible. For example, from the outset of the initial research design we ensured the relevance of the topic to the field through preliminary interviews with practitioners. Inspired by the action research work of Hassan (2006), we approached each research phase as a first prototype, preparing the way for a hypothetical iteration.

In addition, within this first research cycle, theory building and data from the field continuously informed each other. This was reminiscent of Maxwell’s interactive approach, where research design, exploration of practice, and knowledge creation happen “more or less simultaneously, each influencing the other” (Maxwell 2013, 215), and we therefore subscribe to this approach as well.

Given our preference for rooting research in practice through collaboration with practitioners, we saw discursive data collection through qualitative methods as best placed for the meaningful execution of the research (Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013). In particular, interview and focus group methods were selected. In the Methods sections a detailed description of each research phase will follow.

Lastly, for the conceptual framework and the analysis of results as part of this research, a nominal level of measurement was used, for the purpose of identifying rather than for rating or assessing data. We considered this a more appropriate fit with the qualitative nature of the data our research would yield.
3 Methods

3.1 Phase 1 Methods: Building a Conceptual Framework

The first phase of this research consisted of the development of a conceptual framework to address the first gap identified in the literature: the missing definition of youth empowerment towards sustainability. This framework would distil and draw together relevant concepts from the literature in order to collect meaningful data for the investigation of the research question, and to guide the design of the study (in line with Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013, 138). We did this in a two-day design session. The resulting framework for youth empowerment towards sustainability, the YES Framework, would be used to:

1. Define ‘youth empowerment towards sustainability’;
2. Identify relevant practices and activities by which existing nature camps empower youth towards sustainability;
3. Design new nature camp programmes that do so effectively.

These three applications were each explored in a phase of this research. Using a conceptual framework as a lens inevitably skews the collection and interpretation of research data. Acknowledging both the advantages and drawbacks of this, we treated the YES Framework as a first prototype, in agreement with Miles and Huberman’s (1994, 20) definition of a conceptual framework as “the current version of the researcher’s map of the territory being investigated.”

Selected conceptual frameworks

The YES Framework was informed by three existing conceptual frameworks (visualisations in Appendix A), used to design various youth camps and higher education courses. These were found through pre-existing contacts (the interviewed experts in Table 3.1) and addressed some, but not all, of the concepts that would combine to form the YES Framework (see Figure 3.1).

![Figure 3.1 Combining three conceptual frameworks to build our own](image)
**PYE Creative Community Model**

The Creative Community Model of PYE (Partners for Youth Empowerment), developed by Peggy Taylor and Charlie Murphy, guides the design and facilitation of creative, arts-based youth empowerment programmes, including nature camps, for young people aged 12 to 18 (Taylor and Charlie 2014). In particular, it is a framework for transformative, seven-day residential camps. While this framework addresses empowerment for our age group in a non-formal educational setting, it does not use Zimmerman’s definition of empowerment and does not specifically integrate sustainability as part of its process or outcomes.

**EYE for Sustainability learning tool**

The EYE for Sustainability is a learning tool developed by Valeria Tassone (Tassone et al. 2014), describing the learning process in a Dutch university intensive course entitled ‘Empowerment for Sustainability’. The EYE learning tool has been developed over the course of several years, drawing on empowerment literature and transformative and emancipatory education, as well as teaching experience within the university course. While this framework addresses empowerment towards sustainability, it does not use the SSD definition of sustainability, and caters to a different age group in a formal educational setting.

**MSLS spiral learning process**

The spiral learning process of the Master’s in Strategic Leadership towards Sustainability (MSLS) was identified as the third conceptual framework, offering the unique SSD understanding of sustainability. The MSLS framework details the pedagogical approaches and learning objectives of MSLS, a 10 month transformative master’s programme at Blekinge Tekniska Högskola, Sweden. While this framework addresses building individual capacity for Strategic Sustainable Development, it does not draw upon empowerment theory and caters to adult learning in a formal educational setting.

**Expert interviews**

In addition to the analysis of the scientific literature and programme documents behind each of these frameworks, unstructured hour-long expert interviews were conducted (see Table 3.1). As they were meant to clarify and deepen our understanding of each framework, not to be analysed as primary research data, we relied primarily on memory and notes of these interviews (in line with Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013). However, two of the three interviews were recorded with prior consent, and loosely transcribed (non-verbatim). These transcripts served as notes for reference while developing the YES framework.

**Table 3.1 Overview Expert Interviews**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conceptual framework</th>
<th>Expert</th>
<th>Relationship to framework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PYE Creative Community Model</td>
<td>Danny Balla</td>
<td>Experienced facilitator and trainer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EYE Learning Tool</td>
<td>Valentina Tassone</td>
<td>Professor responsible for development of EYE tool and associated university course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSLS Spiral Learning Process</td>
<td>Merlina Missimer</td>
<td>Current MSLS programme director</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Literature and models

In addition to the three selected conceptual frameworks, previously reviewed background literature was also used, notably Zimmerman (1995) for his three component model of empowerment and Broman and Robèrt (2017) for Strategic Sustainable Development concepts and theory. This background literature was identified through search engine searches (mainly Google Scholar and ProQuest’s Summon Service) by combining the keywords ‘empowerment’, ‘sustainab*', ‘youth’, and ‘Strategic Sustainable Development’. In the design of the YES Framework we were also inspired by Theory U for its description of transformation processes (see Hassan 2006; Scharmer and Kaufer 2013) and the archetypal steps of the Hero’s Journey (Campbell 2008) as another lens to consider the empowerment process. In addition we drew inspiration from Toke Møller’s circle-triangle-square interrelationships (Jourdain 2012; Møller 2017), which uses geometric shapes to convey multiple symbolic layers of interdependent components, as a basis for the visualisation of the YES Framework. The models that served as additional inspiration came from previous knowledge, which commonly informs conceptual frameworks, according to Maxwell (2013).

Conceptual framework design

With the input from the document analysis and expert interviews, and relevant background literature, we undertook a two-day design session to develop the YES Framework. We prepared by cutting the three conceptual frameworks into meaningful segments (a process described by Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013, 421), which were visually organised on different working stations (see figure 3.2). In line with Hassan (2006), for the design session itself we used a U-Process approach, moving through cycles of three iterative phases: Sensing, Presencing and Prototyping. The session evolved organically using different ideation methods: sense-making of the data through dialogic process (described by Isaacs 1999), individual reflection and prototyping (part of the U-Process: Hassan 2006), feedback rounds using appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider and Whitney 2005), visualisation techniques, a nature walk to draw inspiration, and a feedback session with an advisor. For a detailed flow of the two design days, refer to Appendix B.

The resulting YES Framework concluded research phase 1. We considered it a first version to be tested and iterated in the process of applying it as a lens for the interviews in research phase 2a and the focus group in research phase 2b, in accordance with Maxwell’s interactive approach (2013).

3.2 Phase 2a Methods: Interviews with Practitioners

In the second research phase, we used the YES Framework as a lens through which to explore how existing nature camps might answer the research question. In-depth interviews with practitioners, which were transcribed and coded with a priori and open codes, were conducted to identify current practices and activities relevant for empowering youth towards sustainability.
**Interview procedure**

After initially contacting 25 practitioners from seven organisations, we conducted eleven interviews with practitioners working youth aged 12 to 18 in four different UK-based nature camps. The interviews lasted approximately one hour. As we were based in Sweden, the interviews were done remotely. As Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013) discuss, remote interviews lack the conversational freedom and rich multimodal quality of face-to-face interaction. By conducting all interviews over Skype, Appear.in or Facebook video chat, we retained some ability to build rapport and be guided by facial expressions and body language (see Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013).

The interviews were semi-structured, meaning they were guided by an interview protocol, while allowing freedom to follow the natural flow of conversation to elicit practitioners’ unique perspectives (Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013, 359). The interview protocol included a brief introduction, and warm-up questions followed by general questions about the three layers of the YES Framework (interview protocols are described Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013, 365). The questions sought to elicit both practitioners’ views and opinions, as well as examples of effective practices and activities. For the full protocol, please refer to Appendix C.

As a rule at least two of us were present at every interview, taking on the roles of lead interviewer and note taker. The latter was invited to complement the lead interviewer’s questions at strategic points throughout the interview. Where a third team member was present, they took on the role of active listener, observing the conversation so as not overwhelm the interviewee. The interviews were divided such that they were each transcribed by the absent team member, so we all familiarised ourselves with the content of each interview. We transcribed verbatim, leaving out verbal tics and pauses, as we were interested in practices and activities, rather than the nuance of individual experiences (for a discussion of verbatim transcriptions, see Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013, 419).

**Ethical considerations**

We obtained verbal informed consent on record at the beginning of the interview to record and transcribe the interviews and use the input in our report. We gave research participants the option to anonymise their input or use their names if they wished. Preferences for anonymity varied, and, recognising our obligation as researchers to weigh the benefits and potential harm of using the outcomes of our interviews (Orb et al. 2000, 94), we opted to make all interviewees and organisations unidentifiable, using pseudonyms. These we carefully selected, in line with Seidman who recommends to “select a pseudonym that does justice to the participant (...) [taking] into consideration issues of ethnicity, age, and the context of a participant’s life” (Seidman 2013, 124). On a practical level, we selected pseudonyms whose initials corresponded with their camp’s pseudonym initial. Further recognising the importance of transparency and seeking ongoing consent (Orb et al. 2000; Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013), the draft report was sent around to all interviewees for revision and requests for edits honoured before final submission.
Research participants

We obtained our sample of eleven UK-based practitioners from four different nature camps via e-mail invitations, after initially contacting 25 practitioners from seven organisations. These were all identified through pre-existing contacts. Drawbacks and advantages of this are discussed in the Limitations and validity below. We strove to select a small but diverse sample to increase the robustness of the study (in line with Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013, 313). A diversity in age, gender, and ethnic backgrounds increased our interview sample’s representativeness of the population of youth these organisations serve. It also ensured a broader spectrum of ways of relating to the youth and the work. We selected multiple organisations as our research aimed to ‘map the field’ broadly, rather than do a case study of one organisation. In addition, while we were more interested in comparisons between organisations than between individual practitioners, we interviewed multiple practitioners for each to develop a well-rounded perspective of the organisation as a whole. It also enabled us to identify successful practices within camps based on the number of instances they were mentioned across practitioners.

Below is a list of the eleven interviewees and a description of their organisations (with pseudonyms). Refer back to this list while reading the Phase 2a Results.

Table 3.2 List of Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alice &amp; Ana (double interview)</td>
<td>Group chiefs</td>
<td>Abalone Camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>Group chief</td>
<td>Abalone Camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>Group chief</td>
<td>Abalone Camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adrian</td>
<td>Camp chief &amp; former chair</td>
<td>Abalone Camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benton</td>
<td>Camp lead</td>
<td>Birch Camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becca</td>
<td>Camp lead</td>
<td>Birch Camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bayowa</td>
<td>Programme lead</td>
<td>Birch Camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camilla</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Cormorant Camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Cormorant Camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carole</td>
<td>Founder</td>
<td>Cormorant Camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danna</td>
<td>Programme lead</td>
<td>Dandelion Camp</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Abalone Camp* are fortnight camps for youth aged 6-18 in bare fields across Southern England, running every summer since the 1930s. Traditional influences of the camp come from the Quakers, Woodcraft movement, Native American traditions, and progressive education of the 1920s. Abalone’s strong focus on nature connection is apparent in all their practices and traditions, which often date back all 70 years to the camp’s origins. Membership
of the camp and affiliated volunteer-run charity is often life-long and runs through families, with youth campers coming back as staff after turning eighteen.

*Birch Camp* offer week-long residential summer camps in Southern England. They deliberately invite 14 to 18 year olds from backgrounds as diverse as possible, with the objective to build bridges across lines of difference in society. Inspired by the work of PYE, Birch Camp takes an arts-based approach to empowering their participants, who are often returnees. All staff are trained PYE Creative Community Facilitators, working with the model that we in part based the YES Framework on in Research Phase 1.

*Cormorant Camp* work with disadvantaged young people aged 12-18 with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties or difficult circumstances, who are referred to them by support organisations. Cormorant Camp have been active in the same deprived inner-city areas in a Southern English city for over thirty years. All staff have experience as youth workers. Over the course of a year, they have nine contact moments with the young people in their programme, ranging from day trips to weekend camps.

*Dandelion Camp* is a peace and reconciliation centre in Northern Ireland, active as a refuge during the Northern Ireland’s Troubles of the late twentieth century. Today, with fifty years of experience working alongside fractured communities, they continue to offer a range of programmes at their residential centre. These include a ‘Rewilding Programme’ and other programming for young people aged 12-18.

**Coding for analysis**

We coded the interview results to prepare for data analysis, mindful of the fact that coding signified the first step in interpreting our data, through meaning attribution and categorisation (Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013, 423). Prior to the coding process we created a coding system consisting of a mix of a priori and open codes (ibid., 422), which we refined as we moved through the transcripts. The a priori codes reflected the layers of the YES framework with their constituent elements labelled as subcodes. Descriptions of each subcode drawn from the Phase 1 Results aided identification of relevant segments. For an overview of all a priori codes and sub-codes see Appendix D. In addition, we generated open codes wherever we identified strong views/opinions and activities/practices that did not fit within our framework but spoke to our research question. We used open coding in acknowledgement of the fact that our framework, as any model, would capture reality incompletely and its iteration might be informed by the results of our interviews (Maxwell 2013). These open codes helped to identify gaps in our theory where it could be improved.

For all coded segments, we logged the interviewee name, the page and paragraph number in the transcript, and a short description of the quote to aid retrieval for analysis and reporting in the coding sheet. Lastly, we labelled them as either examples of activities/practices or as views/opinions of the practitioner, as we were most interested in the former category for finding answers to the research question, while recognising the importance of the context and meaning given to practice by the practitioner. See Appendix E of a sample of the coding sheet.
Limitations and validity

A clear limitation of this study is that we neglected to seek out youth’s perspectives as part of the data collection. This is further discussed in section 7.3 of the Discussion. For this research phase specifically, however, we state our rationale for opting to interview practitioners. To select research participants for this phase, time and accessibility factors were considered, as well as the idea of purposeful sampling, which suggests research participants are selected who are “likely to provide the best information” (Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013, 314). Whereas youth participants constitute the population of the phenomenon of our study (youth empowerment towards sustainability), nature camp practitioners are the audience of this study. Sampling nature camp practitioners would therefore yield the most valid data for answering the research question.

As stated above, the selection of interviewees was done through pre-existing networks in the UK. Drawbacks of this include that we were unable to conduct face-to-face interviews and that our sample was biased to possibly resemble our own views and opinions. Advantages included willing collaboration, practical opportunities for snowball sampling, and easy rapport with the interviewees (considerations discussed by Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013, 315). In addition, as the YES framework was based on Western scientific literature, the bounded locality of our sample increased the (cultural) relevance and transferability of the Framework to the practice of our research participants.

As we were based in Sweden, the interviews were done remotely. As Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013) discuss, remote interviews lack the conversational freedom and rich multimodal quality of face-to-face interaction. By conducting all interviews over Skype, Appear.in or Facebook video chat, we retained some ability to build rapport and be guided by facial expressions and body language (see Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013).

We divided the transcripts between us for coding. Recognising this could negatively impact the reliability of the coding process, we kept a shared online research memo to log insights for subsequent analysis while coding, as is common research practice (Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013, 432). We also collaborated through our shared online coding spreadsheet, worked in the same space and discussed ambiguity that came up in the process of coding and categorisation (ibid., 426). We were liberal in our coding, yielding a rich set of coded dataset for analysis and discussion. In this way, we could all immerse ourselves in the data, beginning to “understand it at both a gut level and as a whole,” paving the way into data analysis (ibid., 420).

3.3 Phase 2b Methods: Focus Group with Practitioners

The primary purpose of this research phase was to test the relevance, validity, and usability of the YES Framework for its intended audience. In line with the action research approach this study takes, the reason for collecting feedback on the Framework is to inform a (hypothetical) future iteration. To achieve this, a focus group with practitioners was organised where the Framework was used as a template to design an ideal nature camp for youth empowerment towards sustainability, in correspondence with the third application of the YES Framework (see Phase 1 Methods).
A second purpose of this phase was to gather more relevant practices and activities from the field. In contrast to phase 2a, where current practices and activities were collected, this phase gathered ideas for relevant practices and activities. This second purpose aimed to collect more relevant data for answering the research question of this study.

**Focus group**

Focus groups are described as an effective environment for encouraging and observing interaction between research participants (Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013, 375). The hour-long focus group organised for this research phase allowed practitioners to cross-fertilise ideas, which the phase 2a interviews didn't allow for. It was different from phase 2a in another respect: whereas we conducted the interviews ‘blind’, with no mention to the practitioners of the content of the YES Framework, we presented the YES Framework to the practitioners in the focus group and used it as a design template, enabling direct feedback on the application of the Framework.

**Research participants**

We obtained research participants through opportunistic sampling (described in Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013, 315) at the Initiative Forum conference of the Youth Initiative Programme in Järna, Sweden, which attracts over 300 international participants annually. We advertised the focus group on the event’s programme website and the Facebook event, calling ‘practitioners in the field of immersive nature-based youth programmes/camps’, in particular those working with 12 to 18 year olds. The focus group spiked great interest and attracted twenty participants from Switzerland, China, Brazil, South Africa, Germany, France, The Netherlands, Sweden, Latvia, Australia and Mexico. The group of practitioners was characterised by a wealth of diverse experience and expertise, with representatives of faith-based camps (Christian and Buddhist), the scouts, survivalist movement, intentional communities, Waldorf education, nomadic self-study camps, and cross-cultural exchanges.

The phase 2a data collection had been scoped to UK-based nature camps and practitioners, and the YES Framework is based on Western literature and conceptual frameworks (see Phase 1 Methods). The international nature of this focus group allowed for an additional test of the YES Framework: its relevance and transferability to field of nature camps beyond the Western context.

**Session design**

We designed the focus group as a workshop in World Cafe style (Brown and Isaacs 2005). The design question for the workshop was ‘What would the perfect nature camp programme for youth empowerment towards sustainability look like?’

In an opening circle we asked each practitioners to briefly introduce themselves and their organisation and comment on what expertise they brought and what they were personally hoping to take away from the session. We then introduced the research and the YES Framework. We informed them we would be photographing and recording parts of the workshop and gained consent for using their anonymous contributions as part of our research.

We divided practitioners into three groups and supplied them with a design template based on the three layers of our framework (included in Appendix G). Some parameters frames the
design of the camp: sustainability was defined as both environmental and social sustainability, and the design was to be of a residential, nature-based camp for 12 to 18 year olds.

After the design session, each group presented their results. Contact details of the practitioners were collected and we followed up a week later with the processed results of the session and to connect them with each other. For a detailed session plan refer to Appendix F.

**Researcher roles**

We took on the roles of researcher/moderator and researcher observer, encouraging interactions between practitioners and feeding the discussion with prompts (as discussed in Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013, 379) and keeping track of time. Prompts had been prepared for each layer of the framework and included questions about the number of participants, staff to youth ratio, duration of camp, infrastructure present at the camp, ensuring a lasting impact after the camp, effective practices and to what skills/capacities in the YES Framework they could see these might relate.

**Limitations and validity**

Time constraints on the focus group session prevented the execution of this research phase to a satisfactory standard, potentially impacting the reliability of its results. We felt unable to fully draw upon the rich potential within the group of research participants. Phase 2b in particular should therefore be seen as a prototype. Nonetheless we were able to yield valuable results that informed the wider research, and were assured of the practitioners’ satisfaction of gaining what they had mostly come for: new contacts in the field and inspiration.

**3.4 Phase 3 Methods: Thematic Analysis**

In phase 3 the results from phases 2a and 2b were re-categorised into five themes. This was done to show how the skills and capacities developed through relevant practices and activities at camp, can enable youth to address specific sustainability issues in a wider societal context.

**Framing phase 3**

In the interviews of phase 2a, the data was analysed through the lens of the YES Framework to identify current practices and activities from the field of nature camps relevant to empowering youth towards sustainability. In the focus group of phase 2b the usability of the YES Framework was tested for its application as a design tool for new nature camp programmes in a focus group with practitioners. This also yielded additional ideas for relevant practices and activities, again categorised through the lens of the YES Framework. Within these results of relevant current and ideal practices and activities we observed much repetition across the layers of the YES Framework. This overlap suggested there was another pattern in the data.
Re-categorisation and thematic analysis

In a session of two days, this pattern was surfaced through a visual re-categorisation. The process of data categorisation is discussed by Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013, 426). First, the results from phase 2a and 2b were transferred onto post it notes, and re-categorised from the layers of the YES Framework into the new pattern until a point of salience was reached and no significant new clusters emerged. In this way, five themes were distilled from this new pattern.

Next, through thematic analysis, we related these themes to specific sustainability issues. Thematic analysis, as Savin-Baden and Howell Major discuss, “acknowledges that analysis happens at an intuitive level” (2013, 440). Through immersion in the data, meaning can be ascribed to the themes and connections that are uncovered. In this way, we induced the connections between the themes of in our results and the sustainability issues they linked to, to show the relevance of youth empowerment towards sustainability in nature camps from a wider, societal perspective.

Limitations and validity

It is important to note here that the re-categorisation was part of the process of our interpretation of the results. While practitioners mostly spoke to the individual benefits of the relevant practices and activities they described, we drew the explicit connection to wider sustainability issues. This may be seen as a limitation when a more objective researcher stance is expected. However, we do not wish to pretend that “themes ‘emerged’ from the data, as if by magic” (Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013, 433). Rather, in line with Yin’s discussion on the process of data analysis, we wished to address the multiple possible interpretations we saw, in order to best answer the research question (Yin 2009 in Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013, 435).
4 Phase 1 Results: The YES Framework

The constructed YES Framework defines the concept of ‘youth empowerment towards sustainability’ as follows:

The process by which certain skills and capacities are cultivated in young people aged 12 to 18 to bring them to a point of being ready to act on environmental and social sustainability issues relevant to them, helping to shift society onto a sustainable course.

It further details (1) the skills and capacities that must be cultivated, (2) the process through which this takes place, and (3) the conditions that facilitate this process. Below is a visual representation of the YES Framework, followed by a description of each layer, its components and where in the literature they came from.

Figure 4.1 The Framework for Youth Empowerment towards Sustainability
4.1 Skills and Capacities

The young person is depicted in the centre of the framework, holding the four leaves of empowerment. These are the essential groupings of skills and capacities, selected from existing models and literature, to be developed in order to become empowered towards sustainability. Below these are explored in further detail:

Awareness

The EYE model mentions both an inner and outer awareness as necessary to empower towards sustainability. Outer awareness is explained as a critical understanding of structural socio-political, environmental, institutional factors and an awareness of resources and obstacles related to the sustainability challenge. A lack of awareness of the structural causes of unsustainability can lead to more harmful decision-making, according to Broman and Robèrt (2017, 18). Inner awareness is the capacity for critical self-reflection, an awareness of one’s own worldview, values, mental maps, beliefs, and self-efficacy to support empowerment towards sustainability. PYE works with the adage ‘attention to your intention creates manifestation’ says Balla, and focuses on building capacity for inner awareness, reflection, and self-acceptance to build empowerment. MSLS also emphasises reflection and self-awareness, as core capacities to move towards sustainability.

Creativity

PYE places a strong emphasis on the role of creativity and creative self-expression as part of the empowerment process. They speak of the ‘creativity imperative’, our human capacity to dream things up and make them happen. Within MSLS this could be considered the ability to create a sustainable vision and move towards it. According to MSLS this capacity is also important for problem solving and identifying possible solutions for sustainability. Similarly, EYE mentions creativity as necessary for imagining new perspectives when in the process of transformation. The EYE tool includes an Enacting phase, where participants create their own action projects that fit with their own sustainable vision, to build a sense of self-actualisation. Balla of PYE states that nurturing curiosity and imagination is essential to the empowerment process. It unlocks creativity, and leads to engaged participation, which in turn leads to commitment in seeing a project through.

Leadership

According to Broman and Robèrt (2017, 23) pragmatic leadership is a necessary component of sustainable development. PYE and MSLS also both mention the importance of developing leadership skills and capacities in their programmes. For PYE these include, social and emotional intelligence, cross-cultural skills, and intergenerational connection. MSLS understands leadership skills as comprising of certain ways of thinking, namely systems, analytical, strategic, critical, futures-oriented, and complexity thinking. Working in diverse teams and communicating and receiving feedback effectively are also considered important leadership qualities. Lastly, MSLS includes skills for personal wellbeing: connecting to others through empathy and compassion, listening and dialogue, continuous learning, personal
resilience with regards to uncertainty and energy, and a can-do, courageous, role-modelling attitude. PYE adds a commitment to learning to this, and also mentions empathy. EYE speaks of leadership as an emergent property of the empowerment process for building capacity to act towards sustainability.

Overcome Challenges

The Overcome Challenges leaf functions in two ways. Firstly, it links to the central role of the sustainability challenge in the MSLS framework as a collective cause for action. For youth to engage in the sustainability challenge, EYE argues, there needs to be a personal motivation or a reason to act. This ‘spark’ as Tassone et al. (2014) call it, enables personal agency in the young person’s empowerment process. Secondly this leaf represents the act of embracing and overcoming difficulty by a young person in their personal life or community. EYE achieve this through engaging the young person in an action project, where the young person has to overcome a real-life challenge. Tassone et al. (2017) state this can build capacity for self-confidence, self-efficacy and create a sense of control, necessary for addressing sustainability challenges.

4.2 Process to develop Skills and Capacities

The process layer of the YES Framework, describes the phases a young person goes through in order to develop the skills and capacities mentioned above. Three key phases, Sensing, Positioning and Enacting are identified to enable the process of empowerment towards sustainability. These are illustrated as the sides of an equilateral triangle in Figure 4.1 of the YES Framework. They are a combination of the three phases of the U-Process (Sensing, Presencing and Prototyping) and the four phases of the EYE tool (Understanding, Awakening, Positioning and Enacting), which are based upon the psychological process of empowerment defined by Zimmerman (1995). The EYE awakening phase is moved to the first layer of the YES Framework as part of the Awareness and Overcoming Challenges ‘leaves of empowerment.’ Like in the EYE model, the different phases coexist, are co-emergent and often happen in many cycles. They should not be interpreted like linear steps. In the following subsections, the three phases will be examined further:

Sensing

Critical awareness of the sustainability challenge

Inspired by the Understanding phase of the EYE tool (Tassone et al. 2014, 130), the Sensing phase incorporates developing an understanding of sustainability related issues, and understanding the sustainability challenge on a broader level. Furthermore, this phase strengthens a young person’s ability to see the world through different perspectives, such as different worldviews and cultural lenses. In Tassone et al.’s (2017, 4) work, this phase can, “foster both an objective and a subjective understanding (perspective-taking ability) of sustainability.” Furthermore, this phase also links to the intrapersonal component of Zimmerman’s model of empowerment, which refers to the understanding people gather from their surroundings (Zimmerman 1995, 589).
However, the Understanding phase of the EYE tool is not entirely transferrable to the YES Framework, as it is tailored to formal education. It includes for example exploring sustainability from an “objective standpoint” through globally and locally related facts, statistics, and expert knowledge (Tassone et al. 2014, 130). It was alluded to in the interviews with Missimer and Tassone that scientific or fact-based information gathering would be less relevant in a non-formal context. This led to the decision to replace the term of understanding. The term Sensing was drawn from the U-Process. The Sensing phase of the U-Process is a data gathering phase, where one observes one’s surroundings to come to a rich and nuanced awareness of the different aspects of systems and their interconnections, as well as an appreciation of different perspectives (Scharmer and Kaufer 2013).

**Positioning**

*Context awareness/own role*

The phase of Positioning is drawn from the EYE tool and is linked to the interactional component of Zimmerman’s empowerment theory. This phase aims to foster ‘context awareness’, which goes beyond awareness of one’s immediate surroundings to include the system the young person is operating in and, especially, his/her own position within this system (Tassone et al. 2017, 5). Context awareness includes the ability to reflect on contextual structures and resources as well as the young person’s own skills and abilities in a larger context (Tassone 2014, 132). With regard to this quality of critical reflection, the Positioning phase also shows parallels with the Presencing phase of the U-Process, which is where one retreats and reflects on the data gathered in the Sensing phase and emerges with new direction.

*Communication and inquiry*

There are key components for the Positioning phase as well. Sharing one’s own perspective, listening to others, receiving feedback and adopting new perspectives can support a young person to see things in a different way (Tassone et al. 2017, 5). Tassone emphasises that collectively, these steps can serve as a transformative process which can help to formulate a vision for approaching sustainability (ibid.). While a collective vision is helpful for mutual understanding and coordinated action, the Positioning phase leaves room for individual interpretation. In the EYE learning process, each student is allowed to create their own definition of sustainability and position themselves in relation to the term. During the interview however, Tassone notes that in a non-formal context, a shared definition of sustainability would be helpful.

**Enacting**

The phase of Enacting is drawn from the EYE tool, though we have also interpreted meaning from the behavioural component of Zimmerman’s model. Within the EYE tool enacting includes being engaged in real-life actions (Tassone et al. 2017, 5).

*Real life action and prototyping*

In the EYE learning process, students are involved in individual action projects. MSLS and PYE, too, talk about an experiential learning approach taking young people through cycles of action and reflection. While ‘real-life action projects’ as performed in the EYE learning process may not be completely transferrable to immersive nature camp settings, the question
of how to bring their experiences back to their home environment will be relevant in this context and can be seen as part of this phase of the process. The Enacting phase corresponds to the Prototyping phase in the U-Process, which is where actions, informed by the Sensing and Presencing phases, are performed iteratively. The PYE model also speaks of the importance of enacting, highlighting the encouragement of fully engaged participation and subsequent commitment, activating increasing levels of creative risk, and achieving milestones.

**Manifestation**

The capacity building in the four leaves of empowerment and in the Sensing and Positioning phases of the journey could be regarded as leading up to this moment of acting, of manifestation in the world through informed, intentional behaviour. During this phase the young person takes positive action towards addressing their challenge, and draws upon their acquired skills and creative expression. Zimmerman (1995) already stated that empowerment processes for individuals, like a young person, will include other people, such as peers, mentors, coaches or facilitators. This leads to the next layer of the YES Framework, the Container.

### 4.3 Container Conditions that Enable the Process

The Container layer in the YES Framework represents the role of others and place in the empowerment process. It covers the conditions which are needed to enable a young person to go through the process and develop the skills and capacities to become empowered towards sustainability.

Inspiration is drawn from the EYE tool which notes three levels of impact: the individual, community and societal. The PYE model uses concentric circles to show how the individual is surrounded by other people who enable the process. In the YES Framework this layer can be seen to represent the community, which we have termed the Tribe, and the Place where the camp takes place. They are represented as a circle of stones that surround the individual in the middle. This geometric constellation was inspired by Circle-Triangle-Square Interrelationship model discussed by Toke Møller (2017).

**Tribe**

Stakeholders who deliver or enable the empowerment process are visually represented in both the PYE Creative Community Model and MSLS Framework. We therefore understand that those stakeholders are fundamental for the success of the empowerment process. These stakeholders can be grouped into three layers: participants, practitioners and wider support network.

Participants are often referred to as youth, participants or change-makers. Practitioners are defined in many different ways in each of the models we analysed. Facilitators, educators, coach and organisers (EYE). Programme staff and learning facilitators (MSLS and EYE). Lead facilitators, volunteers, community, mentors, teachers, nature educators, healers, youth workers and teaching artists (PYE). PYE refer to the wider support network as advisors, social network, programme partners, administrative staff, donors, trustees and trainers.
Diversity is an important resource according to PYE. They identify the intergenerational aspect as crucial to the empowerment process, through ‘collaboration and wisdom exchange.’ Cross-cultural skills are also noted as a key outcome of their programmes and ‘learning from difference’ as an approach. MSLS also cite working in diverse, multicultural groups as necessary for developing change-makers equipped for moving society towards sustainability.

Dialogue also can be seen as a key role of the Tribe for enabling empowerment towards sustainability. EYE suggest dialogic interaction is needed to enable the interpersonal aspect discussed by Zimmerman (Tassone 2014, 351). MSLS use the community of enquiry theoretical framework, to determine that true understanding can only arise through inter-subject exploration. They therefore identify communication including listening and dialogue as essential skills to build capacities towards sustainability (Missimer and Connell 2012, 174).

**Place**

None of the models we examined specifically reference place or the role of nature in their empowerment process. It is however our theory based on literature and interviews that this place-based component can play an important role in cultivating empowerment towards sustainability. See Section 1.6 in the Introduction for more detail. Balla stated in an interview that nature connection fosters nature protection. Further to this he says camps have the potential to strengthen the interrelationship of humans and the natural world. This in turn can invite stewardship over the natural environment and raise awareness of sustainability issues. Balla went on to say that nature camps offer a rich environment for building awareness of oneself, living and cooperating as part of a group, and connecting with the natural environment.
5 Phase 2a Results: Current Practices and Activities

For research phase 2a we collected practices and activities through interviews with nature camp practitioners, that are relevant for cultivating the skills and capacities in the YES Framework. We analysed these in the order of the layers of the Framework and detail the findings below.

5.1 Current Practices and Activities that develop Skills and Capacities

Awareness

Outer awareness
Whilst this was not an explicit outcome of the programmes we engaged, it was apparent their activities could be relevant for developing this capacity. A key way they do this is through nature connection. Amber says for her, it all comes down to “the direct experience of the natural world as something to be in relation with.” The “resulting consciousness,” she says, “means that people know what’s at risk in the world. Because they’ve been there and lived with it, in it, as part of it, (...) and understand much more our impact on it.”

This awareness can be developed in quite practical ways. At Abalone Camp the camp sites are empty fields when they arrive. They dig a trench for a toilet at the beginning of camp and cover it with earth as they move through the fortnight. Digging and replacing the turf in this way, builds awareness of the human impact on the environment. The same with fires, rather than burning the grass, they will lift the turf to replace later, to show the young people how to minimise impact and live in a conscious way.

Adrian, Danna and Bayowa all use methods of storytelling for connecting a young person to the scientific or historic relationship of humans and the planet. Danna says this can be a useful way to reflect on sustainability issues. Weaving the young person into the story of the Earth, its past, present and future, generates a sense of responsibility for the future of the Earth, suggests Bayowa.

Abalone Camp, Birch Camp and Cormorant Camp practitioners each told us that the young people who graduate from their programmes grow up to be further engaged in social, political and environmental aspects of life. Adrian mentions how some young people are moved to become environmental protesters. Bayowa also tells us many go on to be campaigners for social or environmental causes. Carole of Cormorant Camp says this could look like the young person becoming more involved in their communities, whilst Claudia describes how the programme might affect occupational choices to be more nature-based or scientific. This has been known to include working on farms or growing their own produce.

Inner awareness
Developing self-reflective qualities came up in interviews with practitioners from each camp, as an important component for building sustainability engagement in an authentic, not purely cerebral way. “In order to even think about sustainability one has to be able to imagine oneself in relationship to the world and the environment and in relationship to other people” says Bayowa. To do this, Dandelion Camp build in time where the young person can spend time alone in nature as a rich source of reflection.
This reflection can occur also by observing the land over time. “You stand at the beginning and you look at the space that you are going to be living in and then you do the same at the end.” Alice told us. By the end, even though it’s a relatively short amount of time, “you’ve had personal development, feels like you’ve really changed, the whole feel about the land changes.” Cormorant Camp present each young person with a photo book at the end of the programme. They will usually aim to include pictures of the young person doing things that had been identified as areas for learning at the beginning of the programme. This way they support the young person to reflect on how much they have grown through the process.

Cormorant Camp, Birch Camp and Abalone Camp all use circles as a way for young people to check in with each other, and to reflect on the changes they are witnessing within themselves. “On the last night, we have a ceremony”, says Alice, “which kind of celebrates the end of camp but also is a time for reflection and each child has a moment to speak and reflect on their experiences of the time.” They will “pass a talking stick around the circle and whoever is holding the stick talks, everybody else listens.” Bayowa and Claudia both talk about the role of being in circle to explore important topics that might be present for young people of this age such as gender and sexuality. In this way we see gathering in circle as a powerful way to grow awareness of worldviews, values and beliefs.

**Creativity**

Creativity is a core part of the practice at Birch Camp. There are different interpretations of how it is used and can offer value to the process of empowerment towards sustainability. “At a base level, creativity is problem solving” says Benton. Bayowa expands on this describing it as, “the ability to think together disparate things, and make something out of those things, to adapt to a situation, to think through laterally a problem or a conundrum.” In addition, he argues why creativity is necessary for reimagining society, “A collective imagination that is working in different ways, visioning different things, could create a completely different paradigm.”

Another purpose of creative practice can be to create the sense of self-actualisation within the young person. Activities used to develop this quality at Cormorant Camp include creative art, film-making, photography, cooking, metal work, painting garden pots or making bird boxes, singing and dancing. This can also include performing original pieces of art in front of each other. “Not as stars but as standing up and being brave enough to own a piece of yourself in front of everybody else”, says Carole.

The value of this practice is also argued by Benton, in terms of its potential to enable personal wellbeing. Birch Camp use dance, physical activities, such as yoga, martial arts and meditation, all of which have the underlying intention of helping a young person step more fully into their sense of self, according to Benton. “There’s something about the creative process that is hugely healing and very nurturing. So when we talk about social sustainability or sustainability of self, we need to nurture ourselves, and being creative I think is very nurturing.” This is echoed by Becca, who says, “the emphasis is on art as a process, rather than art as a product and art that can help us to connect to community and each other and the world around us.”

Ana from Abalone Camp explains why free time can be just as valuable in developing a young person’s capacities for creativity and self-expression. “The beauty of camps is that
there are organised activities but there is also time where kids can just go in the river and play and actually do what they like.” “I think there are less opportunities for children to explore our own physical boundaries and what we’re scared of”, she says. Sometimes, she suggests, “tootling in the stream for an afternoon (...) can be more valuable than a led activity.” “It’s about creating an environment in which they can play in a more creative explorative way.”

**Leadership**

*Ways of thinking*

We looked for practices and activities that develop strategic, systemic, futures oriented, analytical and critical thinking and the ability to deal with complexity within the young person. The activity that came up time and time again was the simple act of lighting a fire.

### Lighting a Fire

This was a key component of both Cormorant Camp and Abalone Camp programmes, where each young person is given a fire space in which to practice lighting their own fire. We observed through listening to descriptions of the activity that it could be a powerful way to develop strategic thinking. Elements such as choosing the right sticks and logs to keep it alight, using tools, such as an axe or saw to prepare the wood could all develop this capacity. There is “a dexterity element, you have to kind of be precise and when it’s really small you have to be delicate, when it’s much bigger you have to be to be quite confident and physically strong”, says Alice. Ana describes what a special moment it can be seeing a child light their first fire. Especially when using flints and steel, just using the force of their own body. Sometimes they will challenge a child to light the fire with one match”, she says. Furthermore we see potential for fire lighting to develop systems thinking within the young person. For example, Adrian of Abalone Camp describes, “knowing about trees and understanding (...) which trees produce wood which is good for lighting fires which you can then cook on.”

According to Adrian, other practical ways camps can build these skills, is through learning how to live close to nature, with as few items from civilization as possible. This includes: foraging food, fire lighting, using basic tools like knives and axes with wood, understanding about trees, weather and protection, navigation, shelter building, and cooking. Another activity, which cultivates a number of these different ways of thinking is going on a hike. “Every camp has a hike”, explains Ana. “You go off in your age group and walk and often without having planned what site you’re going to camp at.” She explains the group would need to plan what to eat and this would be part of the experience.

*Working with others*

Modelling and being encouraged to engage in “authentic communication” is something Benton considers key to the process of working with others. Cormorant Camp promote this through gathering in circles and encouraging active participation. “We build into the programme an expectation that each person is a member of the group, and that their behaviour, involvement, and participation is vital. So right from the word go we have ways of getting them to speak into the circle”, says Camilla. One practice present at Abalone and Birch Camp camps is the Way of Council, borrowed from Native American nations, and used to hold egalitarian and meaningful dialogue. This would also be carried out in circle with an aid like a talking stick. The main rules of council are, speak from the heart, listen with the
heart, leanness with expression, and assumption of good will. This is a sacred but non-religious act, according to Bayowa, which encourages “people to speak from the heart spontaneously with deep listening involved.”

Assume goodwill came up in all our conversations with Abalone Camp staff. “Unless there is any real tangible reason why not, you will assume goodwill and that we are all members of the same lodge”, says Adrian. “For the good of the lodge”, is another phrase mentioned by every Abalone Camp practitioner, a term also borrowed from the Native American nations. During rally, the twice daily camp gathering, camp members are asked if they have anything to say which is for the good of the lodge, this serves as a reminder to voice their opinions consciously in respect of what’s good for the wider group. Making decisions based upon this idea is central to working well together in the Abalone Camp.

Abalone Camp further build this culture through a process of decision making called consensus. This involves talking things through and finding ways forwards based on what’s good for the group. Even if a person may not completely agree with a decision, the process of consensus enables decision making that is for the unity of the tribe and the good of the tribe”, according to Adrian. He also warns of the disastrous potential of a majority vote method of decision making, to split the tribe.

Within Birch Camp, a culture of goodwill and positive interactions is cultivated using the philosophy of ‘attitude of gratitude.’ Birch Camp activate this culture through the physical exchange of gratitude beads.

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<th>Gratitude Beads (Birch Camp)</th>
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<td>Every day the young person spends at camp, they get given a bead. “This bead represents your time at Birch Camp”, says Benton. So over the week, the young person collects seven beads, one for each day. “But you also get given some special beads which are some more funky looking beads or sometimes some people put workshops on to make them. Gratitude beads!” The young people and adult staff can give these to people to give thanks or show appreciation. This can be between staff, staff and young people, or between young people. “People see these necklaces growing through the week with (...) affirmation and gratitude on them, so they start to want to get them”, says Becca. “So you can imagine a community that is actively practicing gratitude like that, it’s a nicer place to be.” She says she even knows former participants who came back as staff and still wear their gratitude beads necklaces. This points to the enduring impact of this practice.</td>
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Another way Birch Camp build this culture is is by hosting a gratitude circle every day before dinner. “It is very simple”, says Becca. “Standing in a circle, (...) people get to take in turns to step into the circle and say thank you for something, and we encourage people to name who it is and be explicit about what they’ve done.” She describes how by the end of the week it is very hard to close a gratitude circle because the young people don’t want to stop sharing.

Another common way of building trust and encouraging collaboration seems to be through games that play with the senses. Dandelion Camp play games such as Trust Walk, Rope Square and Sheep and Shepherd, which all involve blindfolding participants. Adrian described String Walks, which similarly involves blindfolding, trust and navigation. He also described how they have borrowed fox walking, a Native American hunting skill, which again
involves having limited vision as it’s carried out in darkness under the stars and encourages a sense of collaborating as a team.

**Personal Well-being**

Self-confidence and self-acceptance were the first skills Carole mentioned when we asked which she felt were relevant for building empowerment towards sustainability. She describes this as “being able to accept their difficult qualities as well as grow their more positive, easier interactions.” She goes on to say, “Self-reflection and ownership of your own behaviour is a really important quality that we want to try encourage in them.” As a staff member she feels they can encourage these qualities by “accepting the kids and the young people as they are, not wishing they were something else.” Accepting the youth helps in turn to make the young people feel safe, good about themselves and feel “that they have got a stake in what is going on.”

**Overcome Challenges**

Results showed that by overcoming personal challenges, a young person can develop self-confidence self-efficacy and a sense of agency. The YES Framework proposes this can support their engagement towards addressing sustainability challenges. To do this the young person must first have a reason to act.

“A sense of purpose is an individual responsibility”, says Bayowa. “Whilst the camp can provide lots of opportunities and lots of guidance, lots of feedback through other young people, through the staff, ultimately the sense of purpose comes through continual practice and that requires a young person to have some impetus towards continuing with the practice.”

Birch Camp create spaces for young people to explore issues that might be personal or relevant for them through discussion and debate. “Young people are often speaking about the violence of their own communities, the violence of their families, the violence in the world”, says Bayowa. “Racism, that comes up in every single camp. Diversity around gender. Lack of opportunities.” The environment is increasingly becoming a topic the young people want to talk about, we were told. “When I first did a camp we, the adults, spoke about the environment, but the young people rarely did. But it’s changing, so the young people are bringing on issues about sustainability, global warming into the camp.”

As well as engaging or identifying with a particular cause related to the sustainability challenge, the young person needs to feel like they can do something about it. Cormorant camp staff spoke of this need for self-efficacy. Overcoming a personal challenge was identified in the YES Framework as a powerful way to develop this capacity. One such challenge or fear can be the fear of nature itself. Many kids from the inner-city will “scream at the sight of a blade of grass”, says Amber. Bayowa backs this up, “many of them are frightened of insects, so they go through a little bit of a rite of passage around gaining some kind of ease with the outside world.” Claudia, describes how many children, especially second, third or fourth generation migrants, whose parents grew up in a warmer climates, perceive the English sea as being freezing and scary. At Cormorant Camp they pay particular attention to helping young people overcome their fear of the sea. Abalone Camp use night vigils to provide the young person with a challenge and a sense of overcoming fear:
Night Vigil

The night vigil is the process whereby the young person can, if they choose to, stay awake for the night alone in nature. This would usually involve finding a place in the wood where they might build a shelter or make a fire. Adrian describes how as camp chief, he prepares them to take on this challenge. This includes equipping them with the practical skills as well as skills for understanding the natural world. In addition they would also need to be prepared with individual coping strategies for managing their “inner feelings of fear or isolation.”

Sometimes it takes two or three camps to overcome a challenge according to Bayowa. “They do not always get it straight away, but they will always come back, which is interesting.” Just surviving the camp can involve overcoming fear as well as building confidence and self-efficacy, “the amount of times where I’ve had kids on camp who spend the first week crying because they want to go home, (...) you’re away from your parents for 2 weeks, (...) if you survive that, that’s a massive empowerment”, says Ana.

5.2 Current Practices and Activities related to the Process

Sensing

In the Sensing phase the young person builds an awareness of their immediate surroundings and the different perspectives and worldviews they may encounter, as well as building a critical awareness of the sustainability challenge.

We found that all programmes paid a lot of attention to building the first type of awareness. The family groups of Birch Camp and the intergenerational clans of Abalone Camp ensure exposure to different perspectives across ages and personalities. In addition, due to the diverse offerings of workshops and activities that feature as part of Birch, Abalone and Cormorant Camps, “you have constant encouragement to keep mixing, to keep talking, keep learning names, keep being curious about each other”, says Becca from Birch Camp.

Abalone Camp draws from a range of activities to enhance sensory awareness of one’s surroundings, for example silent meals, where the whole camp eats in silence or blindfolded, and the drum stalk. Andrea described the drum stalk experience in an earlier, preliminary interview, as one of those games that Abalone Camp has that “just switch you on.”

The Drum Stalk (Abalone Camp)

“It’s night, you’re in a huge field, and there’s this massive drum at one end of the field, [that] gets beaten every thirty seconds. All the kids are blindfolded at one end of the field.” The young people make their way to the drum, where there is also a fire waiting. To walk across the field takes 20 minutes, so to find the drum can be an hour long activity. Some of them decide that they want to do it barefoot to feel better into their surroundings. Through the process young people get attuned to the wind and the sounds of the drum. “You’re just slowing yourself down, really, and it’s a memorable experience that you’re not gonna forget.”

We noticed a gap in our interview data around the second type of awareness, as no practitioner explicitly mentioned building critical awareness of the sustainability challenge.
Positioning

In the Positioning phase the young person builds contextual awareness; reflecting and communicating on their role within the system.

We found that all programmes pay marked attention to this phase. “It is a recurrent theme having individuals reflecting on their role as humans on the planet”, says Adrian. Particularly this seems to be the case for the older ones. “[The] 17 year olds, they are starting to look for ways to get involved in a wider sphere in the globe”, Carole observes.

Both individual reflection as well as reflecting through interaction with others play a role in positioning oneself. Abalone Camp offers the opportunity for a night vigil for the older participants (see 5.1 Overcoming Challenges). “If you are staying awake for the 12 hours of night with strange sounds around you and you’re at a stage in your life where there’s transition, you’re thinking about it,” Adrian explains. In Birch Camp, participants write a letter to their future selves, which is mailed to them six months after the camp to give them a chance to reflect on how they have changed during that time.

The group living in the camps gives ample opportunity to explore one’s role through dialogue, and offers opportunities to be witnessed by the community. Whole group activities such as meals and big campfires, as well as the intergenerational family groups of Birch Camp and clans of Abalone Camp were mentioned by all three Birch Camp practitioners and Amber of Abalone Camp as ways this occurs. In all programmes, the closing ceremony is an important moment for Positioning. As part of these ceremonies, the oldest participants who are not coming back or coming back as staff because they’re turning eighteen are ‘graduated.’ This takes on a strong ‘rite of passage’ character, as Ana explains, “The elder kids are blindfolded and led around the fire and welcomed by the staff members.” The value of ritual as a way of initiating a young person into adulthood was discussed by multiple Abalone and Birch staff.

Another activity called the Heart Circle, part of the Birch Camp programme and mentioned by each practitioner we interviewed, stands out as a powerful chance to position oneself.

The Heart Circle (Birch Camp)

In this ceremony, given to the programme founders by the indigenous Maori people, young people have a chance to share a personal story and be witnessed by the whole community. It is framed as an opportunity “to help them move forward in life (...) to let something go.” Bayowa explains, “nearly every young person mentions the Heart Circle (...) as something pivotal.” Benton describes the Heart Circle experience: “It’s heavy, it’s really heavy, all sorts of tears and stuff. But the next day, it’s like something has washed away all the camp’s troubles, then there’s clarity and it’s such a deeper place and connection.” He goes on to say, “there’s no point in not being fully authentic in that space, because what other opportunities are they gonna get in their lives? And they sense it, they know it, and from all the history of it that other returnees have said before, they know that this is their chance to share. And some people don’t share because they’re too scared, and so we have people come back, because they didn’t share in the heart circle the year before and they really wanted to, and so they come back for that one purpose.”
**Enacting**

The Enacting phase in the youth empowerment towards sustainability process is about moving into real-life action through projects, prototyping, and manifestation.

The interviews with Birch Camp practitioners pointed to a salient Enacting phase in their programme. Benton described the sense of community, empowerment and connection present at the end of camp. From there, he told us the young people are asking ‘how to transfer the insights gained at camp back into their own lives and make change in the world?’ Benton and Becca told us they use youth-led debate spaces and forum theatre workshops to explore these themes. Forum theatre is where young people choose an issue they want to explore and make a performance for the rest of camp. In these performances, participants can act out issues they see in the world and with the audience’s help, replay the situation to try and find suitable alternative outcomes. “It is kind of rehearsing for reality”, says Benton. According to Becca, issues brought forth by young people are mostly in the social sustainability realm. They regularly include: controlling parents, racial and sexual stereotyping, discrimination against young people, a good and loving relationship, revolving around equality and community violence.

In Abalone Camp the Enacting phase can be signified by a multiple-day hike, which takes place in the middle of camp. Carrying everything they are going to need on their back, navigating their way, building shelters as well as interacting with the outside world and asking farmers if they can camp on their land, gives real-life experience of realising a project according to Adrian.

Notably, the arts play a large role in all programmes in inviting young people into manifestation, whether it’s in the form of a theatre evening, open mic or, in Abalone Camp, a ‘Merry Moot’ (Benton; Ana; Amber). This ties back to self-expression as part of the Creativity capacity in the YES Framework. Another repeated activity across programmes is the ‘youth led day.’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth Led Day (Birch Camp and Abalone Camp)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At Abalone Camp older groups will have a day where they take over the running of the camp. They will take on all the adult roles, including the role of camp chief. Ana shared her zest for this activity, “It is often really beautiful to watch them looking after younger children and trying out being the grown up people.” Bayowa elaborates on the Birch Camp youth led day: “we elect youth leads, usually four, two girls, two guys. (...) They do all the things that we did; wake everybody up in the morning, (...) sort out the workshops for the day. (...) And then towards the end of the day, they hand back and have a bit of a reflection. From there he describes how Birch staff support the young people to consider how they can apply this agency and newfound confidence into their life beyond the camp.</td>
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### 5.3 Current Practices and Activities related to the Container

**Tribe**

The Tribe is the collective term applied to the participants, practitioners and wider support network who deliver or enable the camp. We now explore ways the Tribe can enable certain
practices and activities to cultivate the necessary skills and capacities within the young person.

**Staff or facilitator roles**

Bayowa discussed the importance of group trust to enable youth to feel safe enough to share and participate in a camp. The staff or facilitator creates this sense of safety through “holding space, which means to also hold intention and a vision for what they perceive as the potential of the young people”, he told us. Carole says the role of staff during the camps is “to engage with [the young people], develop relationships and prepare them to transfer those qualities back into their families and their communities.” In this way, Adrian sees the role of staff to be a mentor for the young people, helping them to grow and develop as people.

**Diversity**

Birch Camp emphasise the importance of diversity to support the group learning process. “Collaboration and learning from people that are different to them”, enables young people to come up against different ways of being, which allows them to develop a kind of critical thinking, says Benton. He discusses the power of camp to enable young people to mix with people who are different to them and overcome personal barriers or perceptions of difference, which you can only do when there is diversity in the group. Camps are powerful containers to meet and interact with people who are different to you, says Becca. “In terms of thinking about sustainable communities and societies its breaking down stereotypes, racism, ageism, disability, homosexuality all of that by having the chance to be friends with people who are different to you.”

**Family groups**

All the Birch Camp practitioners we interviewed gave special mention to the role of family groups as a key way that participants are encouraged to mix. Family groups are made up of four to five young people and two to three staff members. They specifically bring young people together across ages and backgrounds. This is one way a young person might meet someone they would never normally meet, Benton told us. Furthermore those family groups allow security and the sense of belonging to a group, says Becca. Cormorant Camp also use family groups made up of staff and young people during camps. There they’ll have three or four children between two members of staff. They tend to find young people connect with staff more when they’re broken down into smaller groups. Claudia told us this is something they like to do from day one.

**Intergenerational relationships**

Forming connections across age groups is an important feature of Abalone and Birch camps, as a key way to build diversity into the programming. It also makes a huge impact on the way that culture and knowledge is passed on, says Amber. As some of the young people might not form many ideal relationships with adults outside of camp, this can be a positive outcome of camps, Becca told us. Similar to family groups at Birch and Cormorant camps, at Abalone Camp they form groups called ‘clans’, essentially intergenerational groups. The main activity carried out in the clans is cooking. According to Alice, dividing the kids in these groups builds empowerment, “because they start to recognise their own skills as opposed to trying to fit into a narrow box of ‘this is the level, you should be reaching at this age.”

Carole who has been with Cormorant Camp for over thirty years, and helped to found the organisation, states she is able to break down young people’s perceptions of what older people
can do. She is aware that her presence gives great assurance to many of the young people who feel safe with her and find they are able to relate to her in other ways than with other youth workers. She regards this intergenerational connection as something that is “psychologically necessary but often undervalued.”

**Wider community**

It was clear from the interviews that in all programmes the identification and sense of belonging to the Tribe does not end at camp. Carole explains, “We find that the parents and the kids relate to Cormorant Camp as an organisation which they feel great allegiance to.” She goes on to characterise this ‘tribe’ as a “surrogate, extended family that belongs to them.” Especially important in this day and age, as societies are broken down and so many children get brought up in either single parent families or just two parents, but without an extended community. This can counteract issues of isolation experienced by many, she argues.

Abalone Camp also uses the term ‘tribe’ for the larger, permanent community that transcends the temporary ‘lodges’ of the camps. “We’re in a community that is temporarily in places but it has an enduring quality, or spirit, which overrides a specific place”, says Adrian. At camp, this enduring tribal spirit is symbolised by the ashes of the campfires. “People will typically put onto the fire ashes from previous camps which they have brought with them, which is about continuing the spirit of the lodge,” Adrian explains. “And at the last night of camp, there’ll be a similar fire (...) and when the fire has gone out, people will take ashes away with them.” He tells a story of an elderly person who had camped with Abalone Camp when she was younger and who, when she died, had expressed the wish to have her ashes spread on the fires of several camps. “So in these ashes that kids now have with them are (...) some little molecules or small grains of dust of a person. (...) It makes people realise that they’re on something that’s more than just a summer holiday camp, that there is an enduring thing.”

**Involving families and supporters**

Beyond the camp community, families and other supporters have a great potential to play a positive role in the young person’s empowerment process. For Cormorant Camp, who work with young people from difficult backgrounds referred to them by support organisations, involving this wider support network is crucial. One way they achieve this is by carrying out home visits prior to the start of the programme. They do this to “get to know [the young person] in their own spaces, [so they] know that you understand their circumstances” and to “get feedback on what sort of things they would like to do”, says Claudia. They get to know the parents and will invite them to events throughout the year, including the celebratory event at the end of the programme. In this way they support the young person to build positive relationships with a parent or carer which can continue beyond the camp. Cormorant Camp make a point of modelling positive intergenerational relationships.

**Place**

We now explore ways the camp setting can enable certain practices and activities in order to cultivate the necessary skills and capacities within the young person.

All programmes we engaged in this study spoke of a special value in being in nature and outdoors. Camilla points out that “we are nature and we are disconnected from it so much of the time.” She explains that doing their activities outdoors instead of indoors has a greater value and a greater impact and that’s why they want to make sure that they build this into their programmes at Cormorant Camp. Claudia agrees stating being outdoors allows as well
“to be in an environment and in a space where there is no other distraction.” Multiple practitioners from within Birch Camp and Abalone Camp speak of the value of having a digital detox for the duration of the camp. Supporting the young person to disconnect from the wider world and lives back home helps them to connect more fully to the people at camp, according to Becca.

As well as providing an environment with less distractions, Bayowa speaks about the importance of learning from nature and seeing nature and the environment as a teacher. He describes the shift in consciousness that occurs on camp, towards feeling “it is for me and of me and I am of it and for it. That is a powerful shift in awareness when that happens and it does”, he says. In a similar vein, Adrian emphasises that in Abalone Camp they are “trying to help people to come to terms with their connection with the planet and with other animals and the natural world.” Camilla points out “that if young people don’t have a connection with nature, they’re not gonna care about it.”

There are many place-based activities on camp that can help to build this connection. In Cormorant Camp for example they do bushcrafts, such as making fires and building shelters. They do these activities so that the young people can see where resources come from, says Claudia. “You collect the wood to make your shelter or sand to make a picture or do rock art.” She goes on to make the distinction, that in this way, nature can be a powerful learning environment that differs from the classroom. Furthermore, making sure that the young people get a sense of the seasons is important for Cormorant Camp. Planting vegetables and harvesting is an important activity, according to Camilla, as it allows the young people to learn where their food comes from.

Within Birch Camp outdoor activities like nature walks, games in the woods and fire making are used. One Abalone Camp activity that stands out is The Four Winds:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Four Winds (Abalone Camp)</th>
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<tr>
<td>This activity features as part of the closing ceremony at an Abalone Camp. “Four people would arrive at the last fire” says Adrian. The people represent the four winds, from the north, south, west, and east. These are usually represented by the oldest person on camp, the youngest person on camp, the oldest child and the youngest staff (Amber). Adrian goes on to describe how “the fire is built in a very special way, it would be lit with flaming brands, and they would say ‘I am the East wind’, and then the South, North, West, and they put their flames and they would light the fire and they would go and sit back around the fire.” This activity is the most ceremonial aspect of Abalone Camp, according to Amber. She is part of a group within Abalone Camp who are trying to bring back the spiritual or cultural significance of the ceremony, discussing with the young people why they do it and what the four winds represent, and what qualities they bring.</td>
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### 5.4 Open coded Practices and Activities

Whilst analysing our results we came across data not captured by our preset codes, but which we felt were relevant towards answering our research question. This was to be expected, given the YES Framework was based on theory and we had limited knowledge of the field. We have captured the open codes we felt are most relevant below.
Cultural considerations

The interviews taught us that there are cultural aspects that must be considered when running a camp to effectively empower towards sustainability. Several practitioners stressed the importance of having a staff team that mirror the diversity of the young people” at camp (Becca; Camilla; Claudia). “Because we work in a multicultural community,” Claudia told us, “you have to have the staff that totally understand and connect (…) you get far more respect and you get far more done and more out of it if you have got people who represent those communities.”

Becca discussed the role food plays in including or excluding people from different backgrounds. “If people’s food choices aren’t catered for they feel really not cared for,” she explains. She recounted a time when a group of Eritrean youth who were following a vegan fasting tradition were not catered for. She described how it was clear they felt ostracized by the experience.

In another example, Claudia discussed the difficult relationship black people have with water, because of the different reactions of their hair and skin to water compared to white people’s hair and skin. “It’s about knowing the culture and understanding it, and making it safe for them to do all those things, or having people like me around saying, don’t worry about your hair, (...) we’ll sort it out later”, she explains.

She goes on to give another example of Muslim youth and prayer. “If you’re out in the middle of a field and prayer time comes (...) you have to be able to deal with that, and give them the space and comfort to do it. It’s ridding them of the fear [that] it doesn’t matter whether you are outdoors, things can still happen, regardless of your culture.”

Financial disempowerment

It was raised by a number of practitioners that many young people might feel structural obstacles to becoming engaged with the sustainability movement due to financial barriers. When the primary concern is about surviving day to day, engagement in broader sustainability issues becomes less of a priority. This is especially true for the young people Cormorant Camp works with, who generally come from families existing on low incomes. “People who are really struggling to get enough cash in order to pay the rent and feed themselves on a regular basis are not going to have the headspace to care [about sustainability]”, says Amber. Reducing these barriers therefore feels like an important leverage for widening engagement in the sustainability challenge amongst youth.

Autonomy

During the interviews the value of providing young people with autonomy over decision making came up nine times by seven practitioners, who all expressed the importance of giving young people a say in decisions and ownership of the content of the programme. Cormorant Camp visit the young people in their home before the programme starts. “We explain what we’re doing, where we’re going, why we’re going”, says Camilla, “and they make decisions about what bits of the programme they would like to see developed.” “So you’ve just got to
be a bit more creative with the way you plan, to incorporate what they would like to do with what you would like them to experience”, says Claudia.

Towards the beginning of a camp Cormorant Camp will give each young person a postcard, which they can post anonymously into a box in the middle of the circle to share if there’s anything that they’re concerned about. “They don’t get to see them”, says Claudia, “it’s just for us. But (...) if there’s anything they would like to share to the circle before they put it in the box they can.” Receiving input is also important for Carole, “we ask at the beginning what their fears are and what their hopes are for the camp and then we often ask at the end whether we achieved it, whether they still got the same hopes and fears about coming next time.”

This is a similar scenario at Abalone Camp. Ana describes, “there is a structure to ask ‘what are the things you are excited about doing on camp? What do you want to do?’ (...) so people feel like they have an involvement from an early start and they are already expressing their opinions about what they want to do.” “The staff have the freedom all the time to choose how they manage the children”, says Alice. “One example would be bedtimes, there’s no strict bedtimes, you negotiate within your group, what you feel as staff and what the children agree to and that’s kind of a fluid thing.”

Returning

Through our interviews, we became aware that these nature camps weren’t just single events that build empowerment amongst their participants. Many return year after year, and continue as staff after turning eighteen. “Quite a lot of people involved in this have been doing this both as a child and as an adult (…), it’s something that is often a lifetime commitment or involvement,” says Adrian about Abalone Camp.

Benton tells the story of a girl who had been in his family group the first year she camped. Two years later she was turning eighteen, and wouldn’t come to camp again. He explained how at that last camp she stood up in front of the whole community and poured her heart. She described how the first year she came to Birch Camp she didn’t want to come. The next time she came specifically to share in the Heart Circle. After that year she felt she had grown and changed so much, she didn’t need to come back. However the third year she came back because she wanted to support everyone else on their journey. Benton told how the audience were “crying their eyes out” by the end. “That is what happens. We are actually creating communities.”

The long-term involvement goes both ways. Carole shares her insights about the advantages of Cormorant Camp having been around for thirty years. “[I] have worked with kids when they were 5 and now they are 35 and they have got 5 year olds, they bring their kids to our events.” She goes on to describe how as camp participants grow older, they come back to Cormorant Camp staff, saying they want to organise in their communities and Cormorant staff are able to help them do so. “That wouldn’t happen if we hadn’t been there that long.” She observes the lasting impact Cormorant Camp’s work has had in the communities they have been active in. “Young people from here are much more open to new ideas and working collaboratively and across cultures, because we have been doing it so long.”
6 Phase 2b Results: Trialling the YES Framework

A focus group was held to trial the relevance of the YES Framework and gain feedback on the relevance and validity of the research. Additionally, we received ideas for practices and activities for designing an ideal youth camp for empowerment towards sustainability. The findings are structured below in the layers of the YES Framework.

6.1 Feedback on the YES Framework

It was noted that during the workshop practitioners were mostly able to build upon the framework, and there was a naturally occurring comfort using the terms and methods proposed. There weren’t many questions from the group after introducing our research, suggesting they were quickly able to identify with the theory and recognise the concepts as being relevant to their work. Notably however, results on the process layer were sparse, and, where present, rather vague, implying there was a lack of understanding for how this layer could be used for the design of programmes.

6.2 Relevance of the Research

Time did not allow for fully taking advantage of the tremendous experience present. The most important finding, however, had less to do with actual content for design, but rather was the positive confirmation from the field of the relevance of this research.

During the workshop there was an excited energy in the room. Practitioners found the topic and material engaging and there was a hunger to exchange experience and knowledge from the field with each other. One practitioner who wasn’t attending the conference came especially to participate, and expressed a strong desire to meet other practitioners. There was a suggestion of further collaboration through a camp or conference for practitioners to build more interaction around the topic of youth empowerment towards sustainability. Practitioners lingered after the workshop, and some continued their conversation over dinner. They wanted each other’s contact details, be kept up to date on our research, and expressed keen interest in a guidebook. This speaks to a need in the field, where this research could add value by collecting and sharing this experience and knowledge.

6.3 Ideas related to the YES Framework Layers

Skills and Capacities
One practitioner suggested, “turn topics into games, turn theory into practice.” This could involve group games in nature, creating land art, raft and shelter building, and a project of making visible the waste produced on camp to build awareness. Related to Awareness was the suggestion to have young people identify and contribute to addressing local issues in the locality of the camp. Working together came back in building decision making into the daily structure, group singing, and group sharing and reflections morning and evening. Further reflection, building on creativity and ‘different ways of thinking’ activities include meditation,
nature walks and workshops in foraging and cooking. A letter to future self was suggested as a method to “remember and maintain, bring into practice what’s been learnt on camp.”

Ideas related to the Process
As part of the Sensing phase, one suggestion was that the older youth participants could arrive earlier to set up the camp and receive the younger ones, thus creating the ‘social field’ by bringing the tribe together. Games were mentioned as effective ways to build community. Practitioners felt the Positioning phase was about individuals realising their position in the group. They mentioned defining personal borders and showing vulnerability as playing a role here. The design for the Enacting phase was characterised by games, challenges, and real life projects. It was also seen as the moment for rites of passage. A common practice we heard from several programmes was a graduation ceremony, which came in different forms. One example: “We send the oldest participants that are there for the last time alone into the woods to meditate in solitude and silence for 24 hours, and then pick them up to return for a banquet and a debrief.”

Ideas related to the Container
The importance of including a diverse group of participants was stressed by several practitioners, suggesting in particular to reach out to youth who might usually not have the opportunity to live close to nature, or whose parents wouldn’t offer them these opportunities. Accessibility remained a core obstacle to achieving diversity for such a camp. The financing would ideally come in the form of funding from government or partner organisations for bursaries to overcome financial barriers. Perspectives were mixed with regards to what facilities ought to be on site, though there was a clear tendency to using the bare field, supporting the young people to live closer to the elements of land and water, and living in a lower impact way, heating and cooking on a fire. A point discussed was the trade-off between a residential camp that fostered connection to place, and nomadic camps that build connection to the land in a broader sense. There was a strong suggestion that staff ought to be aware of sustainability issues. Ideally the camp would engage local people, and invite experts from different fields of outdoor and sustainable practice.

Practicalities
We noticed a clear interest amongst practitioners to discuss practicalities not captured adequately within the YES Framework, such a the perfect length of camp. There were mixed views, ranging from seven, through ten or fourteen days, to at least a month to be able to disengage from the daily routine of lives back home. One said, “When it’s too short - one to two weeks - you don’t get to Enacting. Stretch it to 3 to 8 weeks.” In contrast, another practitioner said, “community in a field is very experiential, it stays in the Sensing. What you take out and turn into action is for each participant afterwards.” This practitioner continued by saying that such a long camp might be too exhausting for both youth and staff, and felt “10 days is perfect for a good arch and to keep inspiration.” It was felt that it was important for young people to return year after year, so gatherings could be spread out, building on one another, to cultivate the empowerment over a longer period.
7 Phase 3 Results: Taking a Societal Perspective

The results from phases 2a and 2b provided a wealth of data which could be analysed to decipher how existing practice and ideas for prospective camps could move beyond just empowering an individual but build wider societal change necessary for addressing complex global sustainability issues. Through reorganisation of the data, we distilled five outcomes of camps, which can be linked to sustainability issues currently present in UK society, where much of the research has taken place. These societal responses, can be seen as an additional layer for answering the research question, *How can nature camps empower youth towards sustainability?* They reveal the meta-level impact of nature camps, which may be useful for engaging funders or policy makers.

Below, we describe these five themes and how we see they link to specific sustainability issues. Figure 7.1 depicts a visualisation of the five themes.

![Figure 7.1 Overview Outcomes](image)

7.1 Build Personal Resilience

Many of today’s youth experience a social pressure to succeed in exams and conform to ideals represented in social and mass media (Ali 2015; Woods and Scott 2016;). They are often lacking basic tools and capacities to survive in the modern world. This has led to unprecedented levels of mental illness, depression and suicide amongst UK youth (Bedell 2016; Burstow and Jenkins 2016; Snowcroft 2017).

Camilla of Cormorant Camp stated in her interview that a key way they addressed sustainability within their programmes was helping to build resilience in the lives of young people. Often the young people who come to camp have experienced trauma in their lives or
come from chaotic backgrounds. The creative processes used on camp can support a young person to heal their relationship with self, others and the world. This has been referred to as a kind of personal sustainability, the ability to sustain oneself through difficult situations beyond the camp. It is our view as researchers that if the individual is not sustainable then the system can never be sustainable.

Rites of passage enable a young person to consciously develop and grow, stepping into new levels of self-acceptance. There is plenty of space for reflection within the camps, in a public circle or during alone time, which features as part of the schedule. Mealtimes, family groups, rallies and heart circles are public moments of reflection, which enable a young person to be witnessed by their community and feel seen and heard.

### 7.2 Cultivate Engagement within Society and Sustainability

As well as supporting the young person to have an improved inner condition, nature camps have the potential to affect the extent to which the young person feels able to engage within society and particularly act within the sustainability agenda.

The process of a camp allows the young person to experience taking on personal challenges, such as performing in front of a group, and to be congratulated and appreciated by their peers. The facilitators we spoke to told us how this simple act could bring about a dramatic transformation in the young people. This increases the sense of self-efficacy and confidence and encourages them to take more creative risks. The youth led-days where young people are invited to facilitate and host the community towards the end of the camp was a perfect example of this.

The camp is also a great place for the young person to explore and identify with issues in their local community, related to the sustainability challenge. The topics of racism, gender inequality, violence and environmentalism are hosted as part of discussions and debate circles. The camp can be seen as a rehearsal for life, with young people exploring real-life issues and becoming engaged. The creativity practised here can support the young person to envision a better world and with a sense of agency and purpose, support societies transition towards it.

Whilst we think more could be done to help the young people connect with the sustainability challenge in a more explicit way, the issues are naturally present in camp conversations. We therefore see an excellent opportunity for the camp to connect a young person up to sustainability issues that affect them.

### 7.3 Form Authentic Relationships

The word authentic came up in many forms to describe the quality of relationships the camps aspired to cultivate amongst participants. It is clear that camps provide a rich environment for building inter-personal skills through being in community. The results suggest the route to finding common purpose and meaning stems from authentic interaction.
Social isolation and loneliness, are increasing issues, to the point of the media speaking of a ‘loneliness epidemic’ and UK as the lonely capital of Europe (De Jong Gierveld et al. 2016; Harris 2015; Siegler 2015). This loneliness has been linked to phenomena such as gang crime and aggressive behaviour amongst youth who feel socially excluded (ACEVO 2016). This is also characterised by increased breakdown of family units and domestic violence within communities (Womens Aid 2013). The nature camps we spoke to facilitate many activities that support participants to foster meaningful relationships by being authentic with one another. This is a vital skill we see as necessary for overcoming the sustainability challenge.

Heart circles, gratitude circles, storytelling, or gathering in family groups to discuss issues or experiences related to the day, all help to build these capacities. Two of the camps we spoke to used the tradition of ‘council’ to host group meetings, which involves speaking from the heart and listening from the heart. This invites a level of authentic communication that might be lacking for a young person in their home life, school or friendship circles. At Birch Camp they build a culture of gratitude, acknowledging things that people have done and appreciate. At Abalone there is a saying ‘for the good of the lodge’. This invites a culture of collectivism where common purpose is upheld above individualism. It is a small but powerful phrase, which encourages individuals to consider the impact of their actions upon others. This was also reflected in the use of consensus decision making practices.

### 7.4 Foster Tolerance towards Others

The story of difference and othering has been a recurring theme in mainstream news over the past decade (Allen 2016; Sian et al 2012). Political debates, dominated by polarising opinions on immigration, terrorism and religious extremism have created a fear of the other, forming fractures and divides within communities (Allen 2005; Doward 2015).

Over and over again the research revealed the value of working in diverse groups. Having diversity within a camp was considered essential for Birch and Cormorant Camps and came up in all the sub-group discussions of our focus group. Facilitating diversity through bursaries and reaching out to different schools was important in making sure that a diverse range of people were able to attend. Practitioners told us stories about how white children could feel intimidated arriving and being in groups with predominantly black children. They told us how at the end of camp those children would be in each others arms, not wanting to be separated, best friends.

Carole spoke of the importance of having inter-generational representation within the camp, and how some young children sought the eldership older people could offer. The camps encourage mixing through inter-generational clans, family groups and regular mixing of groups. It’s easy to understand why people would naturally gravitate towards people most like them, but this seems to be a great way of breaking down those barriers and creating a more inclusive and cohesive camp community that breaks down perceptions of ‘the other’. Further to this the results highlighted the role of diversity to generate awareness of different perspectives and enable different ways of thinking. Particularly critical thinking. This is a particularly useful capacity for addressing the sustainability challenge.

The results of our research suggested, and it would be worth exploring further, whether the integration that happens at camp can help to address issues of segregation and polarisation,
which are becoming more prominent in cities throughout the UK (Payton 2016). We hypothesise, young people who have positive experiences with people with people of different ethnicity, skin colour, gender or sexuality, will be more likely to challenge stereotyping and discrimination where they see it. This, we believe, can build tolerance, which can help overcome stories of difference, which obstruct our ability to work in partnership as a global society to address issues relating to sustainability.

7.5 Instil Nature Connection

Finally the results brought up the importance of connection to place and particularly the natural world. The belief that having a connection or relationship with nature, was essential for a young person to feel motivated to save or steward it was mentioned by practitioners from all four organisations we interviewed.

Our global society currently consumes one and a half times the amount of resources the Earth can naturally replenish (Rockström 2009). This is a clear indication of the extent to which our relationship to the natural environment has become abusive and undermined. The results of our study show that through direct exposure to the natural world, young people can experience a shift in awareness, feeling part of nature and seeing the natural world as the physical foundation for all human development. This has the potential to create a sense of responsibility and promote values that are more balanced and less destructive in relation to the natural world.

Engaging with the natural world through outdoor activities, bushcraft, night vigils, walks, reflecting in nature, using the five senses to explore the nature, all helped to develop this connection and overcome the fear of nature. The limitation of the use of technology came up in most camps as another way to build engagement with the natural environment. It was noted in multiple examples that nature connection builds a greater appreciation for where food comes from and eating with the seasons. Also, where building materials come from and how they are harvested and the impact on the environment. It was mentioned in our focus group that camps could build greater awareness of the waste we produce and so could affect the way young people perceive their own consumption. The build and pack down of the site at Abalone, including digging toilet trenches and re-turfing fire pits also builds awareness of the impact on the natural world.

All this can support young people to recognise the systems they depend on and therefore consider their own relationship to those systems. This can encourage them to critically consider their own values and behaviour, which could then be transferred to other family members and friends beyond the camp. It was noted that forming this kind of connection whilst on camp even led to changing the types of employment, political beliefs or values, towards those that are more geared towards protecting nature.
8 Discussion

Below we discuss, relate, and integrate the findings of this study, in the form of a set of guidelines that provide practical suggestions for designing effective nature camp programmes for empowering youth towards sustainability. These are summarised visually in figure 8.1. This set of guidelines forms the contribution of this research to the field of nature camps, as well as our answer to the research question How can nature camps empower youth towards sustainability?

8.1 Guidelines for Practitioners

Societal Outcomes

Approaching the research question from a societal perspective, five relevant outcomes of nature camps were identified in research phase 3. These describe the response empowered young people might give to addressing wider sustainability issues. These issues are observed both in the UK context, in phase 3, as well as on a global scale as discussed in the Introduction section 1.1. The five ‘societal outcomes’ this study found nature camps can achieve in young people are:
1. Build personal resilience and positive mental strength to overcome difficulty and maintain a healthy lifestyle, in response to the prevalence of mental illness, depression and suicide amongst youth;
2. Cultivate engagement in society with a sense of purpose and meaningful connection with sustainability issues that they can affect, counteracting the widespread apathy regarding the sustainability challenge;
3. Foster authenticity to enhance the quality of relationships to achieve genuine and positive connection to others, in response to the ‘epidemic of loneliness’ and breakdown of families and communities;
4. Practice tolerance and understanding of others, to build cooperation and equality towards a more peaceful and just world, in response to increasing polarisation and ‘othering’ in increasingly heterogeneous societies;
5. Instil nature connection through direct experience, increasing the awareness of human impact and internalising a sense of care and appreciation for nature, in response to society’s disconnected and abusive relationship with the natural world.

YES Framework
Achieving these societal outcomes begins at the individual level. The YES Framework was developed in research phase 1 to define, identify, and design how a young person can be empowered towards sustainability. It drew upon empowerment theory and Strategic Sustainable Development (SSD) theory, both scrutinised, refined, and validated over several decades. In addition tried and tested methodologies, including PYE’s Creative Community Model for empowering 12 to 18 year olds, Tassone’s EYE Tool for empowerment for sustainability, and the MSLS Spiral Learning Process which applies SSD theory in a higher educational context were used. Drawing on these sources, the YES Framework describes the skills and capacities necessary to empower youth towards sustainability:

- A critical and systemic inner and outer awareness;
- Creativity as a means to imagine new perspectives;
- Leadership skills that include strategic and systemic ways of thinking, working well with others, and tools for personal well-being;
- The ability to overcome challenges, fostering the capacity to maintain a proactive attitude when facing the reality of the sustainability challenge.

Zimmerman sees empowerment both as a process and an outcome (see Introduction). Above skills and capacities could be seen as the ‘individual outcomes’ of nature camps, akin to Zimmerman’s ‘empowered outcomes’. In the Container and Process layers, the YES Framework further details the conditions and phases that enable the cultivation of the skills and capacities described above. Together, these two layers reflect Zimmerman’s ‘empowering process’. They suggest practitioners:

- Carefully select and cultivate a relationship to Place in natural settings remote enough to provide for a contrasting experience to daily life, and build community with a diverse Tribe of peers and staff;
- Within this container, guide youth participants on an empowering process that leads them through the stages of: Sensing their immediate surroundings and build awareness of sustainability issues; Positioning themselves within the systems they are a part of to be able to communicate and understand their role; Enacting of this awareness, through action projects and creative self-expression.
Practices and activities
In research phases 2a and 2b relevant practices and activities, both current and ideal, were collected to support the design of camps. Some key examples follow below, with a description of how they apply to the different layers of the YES Framework:

- ‘Lighting a fire’ is an activity enabled by the natural setting described in the Container layer of the Framework. It can offer many opportunities for personal development, though crucially it was identified as being positive for the development strategic thinking. This is an important leadership skill identified in the YES Framework.
- Reflecting in a group as part of a Heart Circle, engages the Tribe layer of the Framework. It occurs at the Positioning phase of the process, allowing the young person to establish their own worldviews and beliefs in relation to others. This engenders Inner Awareness within the young person, identified as an important capacity in the Framework.
- ‘Night vigils’, where the young person camps alone in the forest as a coming of age ritual, allow the young person to experience overcoming fear. The self-confidence and self-efficacy this can build are described by the Overcoming Challenges capacity in the Framework. The self-reflective character of the activity relates it to the Positioning phase of the process. This experience is made possible through the framework layer of Place and through being witnessed by the Tribe.

8.2 Relevance of this Study
We began this study with the hypothesis that nature camps already empower youth towards sustainability, albeit without taking an explicit nor strategic approach. The YES Framework was developed to define, identify and design for ‘youth empowerment towards sustainability’. This Framework was then used to identify relevant practices and activities through interviews and a focus group. Results covered all fields of the framework, verifying our hypothesis that nature camps have a lot to offer the field of youth empowerment towards sustainability.

Whilst practices and activities were gathered for all fields of the Framework, they were collected from different camps, suggesting the potential for shared learning and improvement within the field. The relevance of this research was validated by the keen interest from the practitioners we engaged and their natural resonance with the YES Framework. Their enthusiasm for further meetups, resources and interaction suggested there is fertile soil for research that can accrue and enhance the expertise present amongst nature camp practitioners. In response to the observation that practitioners do not strategically or explicitly address sustainability, we understand the relevance of this study as follows:

Firstly, to enable practitioners to take a strategic approach to empowerment towards sustainability in their programmes, we developed the YES Framework. It outlines the skills and capacities that need to be developed in young people to empower them to act and advocate for moving society within the boundaries of the eight sustainability principles and funnel walls discussed in 1.2 of the Introduction. We therefore see that nature camps designed based on the YES Framework form a strategic contribution to society’s shift towards sustainability.
Secondly, to enable practitioners to bring sustainability explicitly into their practice, thematic analysis was performed to draw the connection between relevant practices and activities, and wider sustainability issues that society currently faces. The explicit role of sustainability in the design of nature camps may assist the development of more effective programmes. It may also be useful for engaging funders and policy makers, where the higher level outcomes of nature camps will be of interest, by naming the positive impact of nature camps.

8.3 Limitations, Validity and Suggestions for Future Research

In the methods sections for each research phase we discussed limitations related to each phase. Below we discuss some limitations and considerations that pertain to the study more broadly. We conclude each consideration with a suggestion for future research.

Further improvements of the YES Framework

The YES Framework developed in the first phase of this research was used to collect and analyse the data of phases 2a and 2b, while simultaneously being tested for its validity. Both action research and Maxwell’s interactive approach that we adhered to acknowledge the dual, reflexive role theory and practice play in theory building. Engaging with the field yielded points for improvement to our theory, which research action stipulates should lead into a second cycle of iteration. Time constraints prevented the execution of a second cycle within this research project. Instead we approached each research phase as a first prototype, preparing the way for a hypothetical reiteration.

Future research

We suggest a second research cycle that addresses the points for improvement gathered in this research, summarised here. Firstly, the process layer yielded less results than the other layers of the YES Framework. This may indicate either a discrepancy between theory and practice, or a lack of awareness amongst practitioners of a valid aspect of the empowerment process. Secondly, we identified a number of open codes, aspects not identified within the YES framework which we nonetheless felt play a role within the empowerment process. These insights from the field - cultural considerations, financial disempowerment as a structural obstacle to engaging with sustainability, autonomy over decision making, and returning multiple times to build empowerment through repeated experience - highlight potential areas for improvement of the Framework. Finally, the five themes distilled in phase 3 provided a valuable, global perspective answer to the research question. We would therefore consider how these themes could be incorporated into an expanded YES Framework. Since this would make it both a theory and practice-based model, future research would be needed to test its internal validity.

Explicit mention vs. embodied experiences of sustainability

Above we discussed the relevance and contribution of this research in providing nature camp practitioners with a framework for addressing sustainability in an explicit and strategic manner. While we argue that a clear and solid understanding of sustainability is imperative for practitioners to be able to effectively empower youth towards sustainability, being explicit
about the topic to young people themselves is a different matter. In our introduction we discussed how the facilitated experience of spending time in nature and community instils a deep care for the environment and other people. Further to this, a strong correlation has been demonstrated between this care and pro-environmental and pro-social behaviour. Our research echoed this link. With this in mind, we wonder if nature camps need to mention SSD, or even sustainability, explicitly to young people to achieve the same empowered outcomes.

**Future research**
We suggest future research might explore this question, in the form of a longitudinal comparative study between a nature camp ‘control group’, where the focus is on building nature and social connection through direct experience, and a nature camp ‘experimental group’ that explicitly mentions empowerment towards strategic sustainability as an objective of camp.

**Absence of youth perspective**
A clear limitation of this research was the fact that young people were not engaged as research participants. This raises questions about the credibility and integrity of research aiming to aid the practice of youth empowerment, but omits youth’s voices in the process. Approaching the topic of youth empowerment towards sustainability without collecting young people’s perspectives warrants ethical scrutiny. Firstly, what constitutes a young person who is disempowered? Of these disempowered youths, who decides that they ought to be ‘empowered’ and whose definition of empowerment is the most righteous? Whilst empowerment theory, UN agendas, and government statistics and quotas may define our normative understanding of the topic, who can really speak on young people’s behalf and ensure all research and policy decisions are in their best interest? By defining the type of young person we as researchers, programme designers, and policy-makers deem ideal, we project our values onto the life of somebody else.

Unfortunately, time and accessibility factors forced us to make concessions. The short time frame of our research and the time of year meant that no actual nature camps could be visited for direct observation and fieldwork. Data protection hindered sampling amongst youth participants of nature camps. We strove to counterbalance these obvious limitations by working with practitioners who possess a great deal of experience working with young people. Through them we could glean first-hand experience, whilst observing for perceived bias. Secondly, grounding our research in literature and models developed by researchers who did engage young people in their research was another way in which we aimed to boost the credibility and validity of our study. Furthermore, our intended audience for this research were practitioners interested in improving their practice. To that end, it seemed fitting to sample the views and experiences of other practitioners in the field.

**Future research**
For the further development of the YES Framework, it is suggested that future research seek out youth participants’ perspectives as a valuable new angle. This could for example be done through in-depth (group) interviews, in a phenomenological study of young people’s empowerment experiences during nature camp. Alternatively, a longitudinal study observing youth participants whilst at camp, and several years after, to collect empirical data on the attitudinal or behavioural impact of attending nature camp. Thirdly, where a larger sample
size and a statistical study were desired, a survey amongst current and former youth participants or document analysis of impact reports could be conducted.

Expanding the scope of the YES Framework

The YES Framework drew upon Western-based literature and therefore its validity and transferability beyond a Western context should not be assumed. To increase the validity of the Framework’s application in the field we scoped phase 2a of this research to UK-based practitioners. Additionally, we used the opportunity provided by our international group of practitioners in phase 2b to test the relevance of the YES Framework to practitioners working in a non-Western context.

Future research

Our research could be expanded by including nature camps in other countries, in particular non-Western countries. This would increase the applicability of the YES Framework to a wider scope of practitioners from other countries. This is relevant when considering the fact that developing countries in particular often bear the brunt of global unsustainability, both environmental (droughts, extreme weather events) and social (wars, corruption, wealth disparity). Young people are particularly vulnerable to environmental and social risks (United Nations 2003; United Nations 2015a). The young people in these countries might therefore benefit greatly from effective youth empowerment towards sustainability programmes.
9 Conclusion

This study explored the question: How can nature camps empower youth towards sustainability? Drawing upon Zimmerman’s empowerment theory and a Strategic Sustainable Development understanding of sustainability, youth empowerment towards sustainability was defined as:

The process by which certain skills and capacities are cultivated in young people aged 12 to 18 to bring them to a point of being ready to act on environmental and social sustainability issues relevant to them, helping to shift society onto a sustainable course.

The research question is answered in the form of guidelines, drawn from the findings of this research. We suggest these be used by practitioners in the field of nature camps to design programmes that effectively empower young people towards sustainability.

Societal outcomes
Firstly, this study identifies five outcomes of nature camps that are relevant from a societal perspective, which can be useful for engaging funders and policy makers. The study finds nature camps can: (1) build personal resilience, in response to increasing risks to mental health, (2) cultivate engagement, in response to the common apathy regarding sustainability issues, (3) foster authenticity in relationships, in response to widespread social isolation, (4) practice tolerance, in response to increasing polarisation and ‘othering’, and (5) instil nature connection, in response to society’s degradation of the natural world.

YES Framework
To achieve these broader societal outcomes, an individual-centered approach is needed. The YES Framework, developed as part of this research, can be used by practitioners to design camps that empower young people towards sustainability. The YES Framework identifies skills and capacities required within the young person to bring about this empowerment. These are: Inner and Outer Awareness, Creativity, Leadership skills including, Personal Well-being and Ways of Thinking, Working with Others. Finally Overcoming Challenges, as an important capacity for engaging in sustainability issues as well as developing self-confidence and self-efficacy. The Framework also maps out the process and conditions that facilitate the cultivation of these skills and capacities within the young person.

Practices and activities
Through interviews and a focus group with practitioners, practices and activities relevant for cultivating the necessary skills and capacities were collected. Examples included intergenerational family groups, campfires, storytelling and dialogue in circle formation.

As the sustainability challenge becomes ever more urgent, effective ways of engaging new generations positively towards sustainable action will be needed. Nature camps provide such a way. The findings of this research are intended to help practitioners in the field of nature camps improve their practice. If maximised, they have the ability to inform life-long sustainable values and behaviour within young people, who can help society chart its sustainable course.
References


Appendices

Appendix A: Selected Conceptual Frameworks

*EYE Empowerment for Sustainability Tool (Tassone et al. 2014)*

*MSLS Themes and Process (MSLS 2017)*
PYE Creative Community Model (Taylor and Murphy 2014)

PYE Global Creative Community Model Process Map (Taylor and Murphy 2014)
Appendix B: Flow 2-day design session phase 1

Preparation: Prior to the two day design session, we divided the conceptual frameworks and relevant background literature between us and analysed our input by coding for the main components and subcomponents of the frameworks, and additional elements from the literature. We transferred these components onto post-its, and laid these out on tables, one for each conceptual framework with a poster of the visualisation of each framework above it. We ensured we had unlimited access to a sunlit space with minimal disturbances and baked cakes to make sure we were well-fed and operating in a positive environment, conducive to creativity, throughout the two days.

First day: The first day we began with a check-in, sharing our intentions and desired outcome for the design session. We took time in silence to walk around and read through the post-its at the three conceptual framework stations. We then presented to each other the conceptual framework that we had each analysed, and our findings from the background literature we had studied. Through this Sensing phase we noticed the purpose of the YES Framework, and with it our overall research purpose, had begun to shift slightly. We went into a presencing phase, where we took some time for dialogue to tease out this shift, and collectively reframe the purpose of the YES Framework and overall research (see above section on Research question and purpose for this phase).

We then took time to individually harvest elements and patterns we discerned from our input, as well as some basic shapes (symbols and metaphors) for the visualisation of the YES Framework.

We then moved into a first prototyping phase, individually attempting to synthesise the elements and shapes into a visualised framework. We came back together and shared our thought processes and initial prototypes. We then made a first attempt to put these together into one collective framework. We ended the day with a first version of a conceptual framework, capturing some important elements and testing some shapes for a visualisation.

We sent this and a list of the central elements from each conceptual framework and background literature to one of our advisors for feedback. We had a brief round of check-outs. We left the conceptual framework stations and all whiteboard notes and flip chart sheets in place to come back to the next day.

Second day: The day again began with a Sensing phase, starting with a check-in to share how we were experiencing the process, and any insights we had during the previous evening, night, or morning. We then began by re-reading the list of elements we had sent to our advisor the previous afternoon.

Following this we took 20 minutes to go outside individually for a presencing exercise, drawing inspiration from the natural world that could provide metaphor, new insight or inspire innovation through biomimicry. We came back to present to each other unique insights that occurred during this exercise. Through a dialogic process we built on each other’s insights and developed the input of this exercise into what would become core features of the YES Framework.

At 11am our advisor came in for an hour of external feedback. This enabled us to again assimilate all the thinking from the previous day and morning. This conversation was recorded and notes taken for future reference. After this, we went through three rounds of individual prototyping; synthesising the core elements distilled from the three frameworks and background literature; input from the nature exercise and feedback session with our advisor; and previous framework prototypes and insights from our group dialogue.
After each round, we presented our prototypes to each other and were given positive feedback using an appreciative inquiry approach (Cooperrider and Whitney 2005), affirming good ideas and asking constructive questions. In the final exercise, we pulled together the visualisations of our most developed prototypes, and in a highly synergistic process synthesised the YES framework layer by layer, bringing together each other’s best ideas. We ended the day with a slightly longer check-out, reflecting and feedbacking on the process of the past two days, personal learnings and intentions to take away, and a round of appreciations.

Appendix C: Interview Protocol Phase 2a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0:00</td>
<td>Interview procedure</td>
<td>You are being asked to participate in a research study into the potential of immersive nature-based youth camps for empowering young people towards sustainability. The purpose of this research is to develop a guide with a framework and practices that can be used to enhance or design immersive nature-based programmes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mutuality understanding sustainability</td>
<td>When we say sustainability, we take into account both environmental and social considerations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|    | 0:05 | Declaration of consent    | We ask for your permission to  
• Record this interview,  
• Transcribe it,  
• Use the input for our research  
• It will be confidential if you wish |
|    |      | Warm-up questions         | How long have you worked in this field?  
What do you like about working with young people?  
What role does sustainability play for you in your work? |
|    |      | Personal skills and capacities |                                                                          |
| 1  | 0:10 | General                   | What personal skills and capacities do you consider necessary for a young person to become empowered towards sustainability?  
What practices/activities in your programme build these skills and capacities? |
| 2  |      | Awareness                 | How do you make young people aware of their values, worldviews, role within society?  
What practices/activities foster this self awareness in your programme? |
<p>| 3  |      | Creativity                | Are there practices/activities in your programme that support a young person to learn creative problem solving skills? |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Skills</td>
<td><em>systems thinking, working with others, personal skills</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>How do you foster passion and motivation towards a chosen challenge? How do you build capacity to facing difficulty?</td>
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</table>

**The Process / Journey**

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</table>
| 6 | 0:30 | General | **How would you briefly describe the stages of the process you take young people through while on camp?**  
**How does the process help young people build these qualities and skills?** |
| 7 | Sensing | How do you build awareness of sustainability issues? Are there any practices/activities that focus on becoming aware of one’s surroundings? |
| 8 | Positioning | *self in context, critical awareness* |
| 9 | Enacting | How are young people encouraged to act in the programme?  
What do you do to create agency or self-control in a young person they can take away? |

**Container / Environment**

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| 10 | 0:50 | General | **What conditions are important to enable this process?**  
**How do you create these conditions?** |
| 11 | Tribe | What is the role of the group on a young person’s learning?  
What practices foster these roles of the tribe in camp? |
| 12 | Place | What can you tell us about the importance of place during these camps?  
How does this feature as part of the programming? |

**Bonus Question**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is your favourite activity?</td>
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</table>

**Closing**

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</table>
| 1:00 | Thanks | Thank you for participating in this interview. We appreciate you taking the time to do this. We may contact you in the future if we might have some follow-up questions.  
Is there anyone else you suggest we contact for an interviews?  
If you have any questions, please let us know. |
## Appendix D: Overview of a priori Codes and Sub-Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framework layer</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Sub-codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skills and capacities</td>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>Outer awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Inner awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>Imagination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self-expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Ways of thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Working with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>Personal motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>Sensing</td>
<td>Critical awareness of sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Immediate surroundings &amp; different perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positioning</td>
<td>Context awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Communication &amp; inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enacting</td>
<td>Real life action &amp; prototyping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Manifestation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Container</td>
<td>Place</td>
<td>Nature &amp; place identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Safe space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tribe</td>
<td>Camp community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wider community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E: Coding Sheet - Selection of the priori codes of the Process layer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Context awareness</th>
<th>Own role</th>
<th>Own role</th>
<th>View/Opinio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alan p6, 3</td>
<td>Own role</td>
<td>recurrent theme of having individuals reflecting on their role as humans on the View/Opinio</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol p8, 1</td>
<td>Own role</td>
<td>come to their 17 years old they are starting to look for ways to get involved in View/Opinio</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol p4, 3</td>
<td>Belonging in world</td>
<td>if you can feel that you belong to imayla and that imayla belongs in the world View/Opinio</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol p7, 3</td>
<td>Disengagement</td>
<td>I think that the kids that we work with, especially in Imayla, are disengaged, the View/Opinio</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bayowa p6, 1</td>
<td>Intention setting</td>
<td>Intention setting activity</td>
<td>Activity/prac</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan p7, 3</td>
<td>Preparing for hike</td>
<td>you’d go through a number of skill things and sort of preparation, I mean games Activity/prac</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audrey p10, 3</td>
<td>Rite of passage</td>
<td>you camp as a child and then if it’s at all possible you will be supported to staff Activity/prac</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan p4, 3</td>
<td>Night vigil</td>
<td>the night vigil (…) if you are staying awake for the 12 hours of night with stars Activity/prac</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix F: Workshop design Focus Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Harvest</th>
<th>Resources / setup</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5-5.05</td>
<td>Check in – each participant can introduce themselves, what are you bringing? What do you want to take away?</td>
<td>Check in, see what’s in the room</td>
<td>Harvest in notebooks</td>
<td>Circle of chairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.05 – 5.10</td>
<td>Introduce research, MSLS, ethics. Framework and purpose of the session – Framework is a prototype, we will use it, Steph (Awareness and Overcoming Challenges), Brendan (Creativity and Leadership skills), Process (Steph), Container (Brendan)</td>
<td>Make sure that the programmes are designed from our framework</td>
<td>A large visual of the framework</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Design for the programme</td>
<td>Template sheets</td>
<td>Other Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.10 - 5.25</td>
<td>In groups, ideally 3, fill in the template designing the perfect empowerment towards sustainability camp</td>
<td>4 template sheets, 4 x visuals of the framework</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.25 - 5.35</td>
<td>One person stays at the project they designed, everyone else swaps. The person who stayed introduces what they designed so far. They then turn their back and listen to the group discussion and harvest comments</td>
<td>Get feedback on the design in an undirected way to reduce individual bias</td>
<td>We can create a harvest sheet for the feedback - form of a mindmap</td>
<td>Paper / Pens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.35 - 5.45</td>
<td>Participants then return to their original group. They are updated on the feedback and they spend some time improving the programme.</td>
<td>Get some new insight which can be used to improve the design. Also important that we get the harvest of this</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.45 - 5.55</td>
<td>Each group presents their final programme</td>
<td>Celebrate the work that has been achieved and leave feeling complete</td>
<td>Record the presentations</td>
<td>Semi circle with group presenting at the front. Record using phone or laptop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.55 - 6.00</td>
<td>Check-out - how was this process for you? Any key learnings?</td>
<td>Close</td>
<td>Record in notebooks</td>
<td>In a circle. Notebook, pen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6pm</td>
<td>Sheet to collect contact details of participants</td>
<td>In case we need to get consent later. Ask follow up questions</td>
<td>List</td>
<td>Paper / pen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>