Operating Plan 2021

## Objectives

Given the expected appointment of the Special Chair “Human-nature relationships in the Anthropocene” by September 1st or soon after, NatureCollege will be preparing the ground for an effective start of the Chair. Aim is to strengthen the NatureCollege’s profile and visibility as the cradle of the Chair, and to enhance the functioning of the Chair within a dedicated Research and Education Network.

The following elements will serve these purposes:

1. NatureCollege-Education
2. NatureCollege Research Network
3. Profiling of NatureCollege and the Chair
4. NatureCollege Circle of Inspiration
5. Practical working conditions of the Chair

## 1. NatureCollege-Education

The activities of the Chair are embedded in Wageningen University and actively supported by the Nature College. Education and research will fundamentally reach beyond Wageningen University and will focus on a relational learning environment for students and young professionals from various backgrounds. Alongside the Chair, the NatuurCollege Foundation has therefore initiated a separate organisational unit: NatureCollege-Education (i.e. NC-E), situated at WUR campus as part of the start-up community. NC-E supports the proposed chair by developing and supporting courses across a network of institutes and educational means to align cross-institutional student involvement (WO, HBO and MBO) as well as professional and life-long learners within (semi-) governmental organisations and companies. NC-E adheres to the Executive Board of the NatuurCollege Foundation. The proposed chair and NC-E will act independently yet in synergy with each other.

In June 2021 a series of workshops is being organised to define the NatureCollege educational methodology (Leerconcept NatureCollege) in more detail.

## 2. NatureCollege Research Network

The Special Professor and the PhD Candidate will initiate and define the Chair’s initial core research activities in consultation with the Chair Group FNP and NatureCollege. In the meantime the Research Network of the NatureCollege will further be extended. Commitment of partners to potential joint research projects will be identified, e.g. answering SIA calls, NWO calls and other research opportunities.

Envisaged Partners are WUR chair groups, VanHallLarenstein, EUR, RUU.

As soon as the chair will be appointed the process will be started to define a suitable subject for the PhD candidate, to assure a prompt start of the PhD research.

## 3. Profiling of NatureCollege and the Chair

To introduce the new Nature College to students and partners a communication strategy is being developed, including logo, website, events. Therefore, a series of workshops is organised in June 2021.

## 4. NatureCollege Circle of Inspiration

The NatureCollege Circle of Inspiration is an informal think tank consisting of 6 people from the Network of the NatuurCollege Foundation, who provide solicited and unsolicited advice in a personal capacity. From the side of the NatureCollege-Education, the director and one or more of his team members, as well as the extraordinary professor, take part. One of the external members will chair the meetings. The composition consists of three persons from scientific / practical research and three persons from performing or creative arts.

The Circle of Inspiration is kept informed in writing of the developments regarding the NatureCollege-Education and the chair. The Sounding Board meets four times a year to discuss these developments, each time one of the external members explains a subject that they consider a substantial source of inspiration. The ambition is to formulate recommendations for the relationship between NatureCollege-Education and the scientific work of the special chair. At the next meeting, the core team of the Nature College will report back on what happened to the recommendations.

In principle, the meetings take place on Wednesday afternoons from 17:00 - 19:30, including a meal, and can also be organized outside Wageningen if necessary.

## 5. Practical working conditions of the Chair

The appointment of the special professor is expected by the 1st of September 2021. This brings a number of practical and personnel matters to be arranged. It would be good to start discussing these before summer to prevent unforeseen issues.

The **Nature College** will take care of

* acquainting the special professor with the relevant research and education networks out of Wageningen University and with the Executive Board of the Nature College,
* establishing a circle of inspiration, consisting of representatives of these networks,
* pro-active engagement in identifying and fostering cooperation opportunities for research and education projects,
* developing educational modules in relation to the Chair’s research programme,
* design and manage the website of the Nature College, to regularly report on the state of affairs around the special chair in close coordination with ESG Communication officers,
* administrative affairs related to the appointment of the professor and the PhD candidate,
* travel and accommodation costs of the professor.

Since the **Forest & Nature Policy Group** is the hosting Chair Group, FNP will take care of introducing the special professor to the members of the Chair Group, to the research and education activities and to the administrative and accounting regulations. Also, the Chair Group will take care of:

* introduction to the Rector and the ESG Director,
* introduction to the WUR premises, library, educational facilities,
* introduction to relevant other chair groups,
* provision of workspace and eventually laptop; WUR web-account,
* facilitation of accommodation (provisionally the Professor will each year spend three periods of two or three weeks each in Wageningen),
* identification of a proper theme for the PhD research of the PhD candidate to be hired.

It would be indispensable to have one of the members of the Chair Group to act as a daily contact person for the special professor in relation to regular information exchange about relevant matters within the Chair Group, ESG and WUR, and in relation to research and education planning. This has been confirmed by the Acting Chairholder, a name will be communicated shortly. Because of the irregular presence of the special professor, she will further strongly lean on the support of the administrator and the secretary of the Chair Group for the administrative affairs and the organisation of meetings and events.

The **Environmental Sciences Group** will take care of actively seeing to it that – given the interim situation in the leadership of the Chair Group FNP – the special chair is successfully embedded within the FNP Group on the longer term, and that FNP can invest in research staff at post-doc level to strengthen the field of human-nature relationships in the Anthropocene for the five years to come, as follows:

* ensuring structural capacity by adding at least 2 fte post-doc staff members in the human-nature relationship domain to reinforce the spider-in-the-web ambition of this special chair,
* supporting a yearly symposium/manifestation co-financed by the NatureCollege Foundation, to foster human-nature dialogues trans-institutionally.

## Outlook

NatureCollege Foundation has a long tradition of creating spaces for learning and reflection that strengthen people’s connections and relations with nature. NatureCollege aims to further develop these practices on all levels of higher education (Universities of Applied Sciences and life-long-learning programmes) and to facilitate the development of a solid scientific basis for the underlying philosophy and methodology of the Foundation. This will allow the students to consciously develop a respectful relationship with nature based on inner awareness of the intrinsic interdependence of people and nature. The proposed chair will have a pivotal role in developing this scientific basis.

In the coming 5 years this will lead to contributions to education and research within universities as well as other educational and societal institutions. Living Labs, for example in the sphere of spatial planning and design, nature rehabilitation and urban development, will play an important role. The chair will offer opportunities for internships, PhD research and external minors, while contributing to the solution of practical research, design and management questions.

It is the ambition of NatureCollege that the Special Chair will develop a thorough and inspiring education and research programme, answering a vivid demand from a broad spectrum of students and professionals. This should enhance at least the continuation of the Special Chair for a next term of 5 years, and possibly pave the way for a full professorship.

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