

Connections to Nature & Inclusive Conservation in the Mnisi Community of South Africa



in partnership with Nourish EcoVillage, Abundant Village, and Manyeleti Game Reserve

ABSTRACT

The deep historical injustices of colonialism and apartheid have dispossessed the communities surrounding South Africa's Kruger National Park of their native land, separating them from many of the benefits of nature. This has created a culture of fortress conservation, where the local community is viewed as outsiders, rather than incorporated into conservation efforts. Traditional ecological knowledge has been fostered over generations, providing invaluable insights into local biodiversity, however, this knowledge is at risk of being lost. Thus, through participatory methods, such as Participatory Mapping, Photovoice, and Transect Walks, traditional knowledge is mapped by members of the Mnisi community, with a focus on youth and elders. Ultimately, the documentation of this environmental history and blending the knowledge into modern conservation efforts aims to promote inclusion throughout the region.

PARTICIPATORY METHODOLOGIES



COMMUNITY MAPPING

Community Maps allow participants to explore their lived environments through a new lens: identifying key landmarks, favorite spaces, and areas for improvement. Participants reflected on their maps utilizing the below Key:

- Connections to Nature
- DisConnections to Nature
- ★ Favorite Space in Nature

TRANSECT WALKS

Transect walks bring maps "to life" as community members share key places and plants, and the traditions they grew up with. Researchers are active observers and listeners, asking questions and capturing photos along the chosen path to uncover local culture, history, challenges, and environmental and social resources.



PHOTOVOICE

The PhotoVoice Mission tasked 15 young adults ages 14-27 as co-researchers to explore their communities through photography, taking photos of places that highlighted their connections and disconnections to nature. Prompted by what was discovered during mapping, the photo researchers uncovered spaces that they hope to share with others, ultimately sparking change and reflection within their communities!

ANALYSIS

Data was analyzed thematically, mapping out shared patterns on community perceptions of nature and key insights into Traditional Ecological Knowledge.

KEY INSIGHTS

Connections to Nature and Traditional Ecological Knowledge is rooted in local community spaces (homes, dams, rivers and other shared spaces) **rather than protected areas.**

Elders hold rich Traditional Ecological Knowledge rooted in native & medicinal plants.

Youth have important perspectives on community well-being and nature that can be **empowered through participatory research.**

Shared spaces can foster inter-generational knowledge exchange, ultimately protecting cultural heritage and the environment.

OUTPUTS

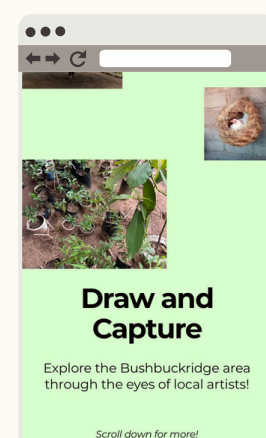
Virtual Transect Walks



Sharing Symposium and Photo Gallery



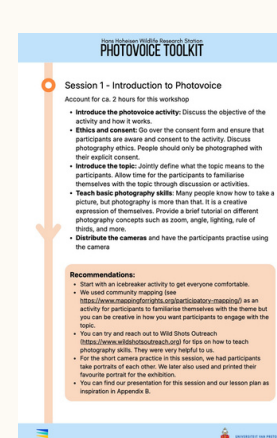
Website Photo Gallery



Photovoice and Transect Walk Booklets



PhotoVoice Toolkit



Scan the QR code to explore photos, transect walks, community maps, and much more!

