CHALLENGING THE "APARTHEIDS" OF KNOWLEDGE

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Chapter 11

Identifying and exploring possible challenges encountered by local communities regarding the conservation volunteering activities in Kruger National Park

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1. Introduction

The primary goal of protected areas is biodiversity conservation (Watson, Dudley & Segan, 2014). To reach national and international conservation targets, protected areas are demarcated and maintained throughout the world. The establishment and maintenance of such areas are not without conflict, ranging from buying land for conservation purposes to loss of economic opportunities for food or wood production (McCarthy *et al.*, 2012; Ruslandi & Putz, 2011; Venter, Magrath, Outram, Klein, Marco & Watson, 2018). Protected areas, however, are not just the site of biological diversity – they also have great cultural value and appeal.

The appeal of protected areas is not restricted to one group of people. Communities from different cultures use green spaces in urban and peri-urban areas. These spaces can be protected areas or private reserves and they provide a space where different cultures can be celebrated in the same space (Sustainable Tourism – Parks and Culture, 1997-2010). Parks provide a primary contact with biodiversity and natural environment for many people in their personally chosen form of interactions with a public green space. This space also often offers broader social benefits, such as acting as meeting places that give a shared focus to diverse communities (Barbosa, Tratalos, Armsworth, Davies, Fuller, Johnson, & Gatson, 2007).

Although driven by national conservation targets, the expansion of protected areas is hindered by costs (Armsworth *et al.*, 2013), which has been recognised by the conservation field (Naidoo Balmford, Ferraro, Polasky & Ricketts, 2006; Wilson, Cawardine, & Possingham, 2009). The need to counteract such costs, coupled with the rise in awareness about conservation efforts, led to the strengthening of volunteer programmes in protected areas (Halpenny & Caissie, 2003) that will provide labour for different aspects of a protected area's management. Volunteers can be involved in fundraising, habitat management (Bremer & Graeff, 2007), control of invasive species (Bryce, Oliver, Davies, Gray & Urquhart, 2011), amongst others (see, for example, Schmeller *et al.*, 2009; Silvertown, 2009; Crall, Newman, Jarnevich, Stohlgren & Waller, 2010; Ramsey & Addison, 1996). The number of volunteers can also be a good indicator of support for the protected area where they volunteer (Armsworth *et al.*, 2013). This support status can influence future planning decisions on how to maintain such support or how to increase it. As well as expressing their stewardship, protected areas volunteers are usually in better general health with less trips to their doctor (Koss & Kingsley, 2010). Crucial for the survival of protected areas, the support of community members and their inclusion in the management of such spaces through volunteering can promote a sense of ownership and improve the relationship between community members and conservation institutions.

Protected areas in South Africa

The South African National Parks (SANParks) was established according to the Protected Areas Act, 2003, with the aim to manage the biodiversity conservation of South Africa and the heritage of these landscapes through national parks (Protected Areas Act 2003). Throughout its history, SANParks has had a good record of biodiversity conservation, achieved through well-defined management objectives combined with monitoring programmes (Swemmer & Taljaard, 2011).

On top of management staff, SANParks houses a volunteering programme. SANParks Honorary Rangers (SHRs) programme provides an entry point for community members and businesses to get involved in conservation initiatives in South Africa. SHRs are volunteers who dedicate their free time and skills to support the conservation of the country's national parks. Honorary Rangers are involved in different activities, from welcoming guests at entry gates to fundraising events. One of the most notable initiatives is the Junior Honorary Rangers programme that inspires youngsters to understand the value of conservation. All funds raised by the Honorary Rangers are used in strategic SANParks projects (SANParks Volunteers, 2018).

Although the Honorary Rangers initiative is well-established, limited research has been done on the impact of such programmes on the volunteers, the challenges they face to reach the programme, and those experienced during its course. Such programmes depend on their visibility to attract new volunteers, but how widespread the knowledge about such initiatives is, within the communities around protected areas as well as amongst tourism students or even tourist guides, is unknown.

The aim of this chapter is twofold: 1) to identify and explore the possible challenges encountered by local communities in conservation volunteer organisations/activities; and 2) to identify possible solutions for these challenges and equip local communities to work with SANParks and contribute towards building a broad constituency for conservation in a citizen-centred way.

Including local communities around the parks in parks' management, with communities taking ownership of the park and seeing the benefits of biodiversity conservation for themselves and for the nation, has a direct impact on knowledge production and dissemination. This is the key link between this topic and social innovation. This speaks to the social and political dimensions of social innovation (Klein *et al.*, 2013), with social change and justice at its core. By promoting social inclusion through stimulating and giving a space for knowledge from outside academia to flourish and building and strengthening social relations, social innovation continuously chips away on the apartheid of knowledge.

2. Study site and methods

2.1 *A brief history of the Kruger National Park*

To understand the history of the Kruger National Park (KNP), one needs to look at the history of South Africa. During apartheid, only 13% of the total territory of South Africa was set aside for black South Africans, who represented 80% of the population. In line with this legislation, black communities were forcibly evicted

from their homes so that land could become a conservation area (Carruthers, 1995; Mabunda, Pienaar & Verhoef, 2003). After the democratic elections of 1994, the land restitution process aimed to restore not only land access but also dignity for communities that were wrongfully evicted (Walker, Bohlin, Hall & Kepe, 2010). Individuals, families or communities who were wrongfully evicted from their lands after 1913 and can prove so, can lay a claim to their land. If the claim is successful, claimants are allowed to have their rights to the land restored or choose financial compensation, an alternative land or a combination of these options. However, if the land claimed is now a protected area and claimants choose restoration, they and the conservation agency in charge must enter into a collaborative management agreement.

There was a time when almost half the area of the Kruger was under land claim by rural communities who were forcibly relocated from within its borders before or during the apartheid era, and presently some of the claims have been settled, some have been dismissed, with some still outstanding (Siyabona Africa, 2020). These surrounding communities are currently being assisted by the South African government to have a share in management of what was historically their land, and are engaged with KNP in joint decision-making about the land use for conservation purposes. Most of the rural people are seeking benefits and poverty alleviation as first outcomes of the land value of the Kruger and its wild animal populations. Although not directly related to the Honorary Rangers programme, the social and historical context paint a picture of the environment where such initiatives exist, and it can help explain some of the challenges therein.

Volunteers have been part of the history of the KNP since 1902 and they play a key role in sharing some of the workload with full-time staff. Today SANParks counts more than 1 600 volunteers in all of the 21 national parks (SANParks Volunteers, 2018). The study was conducted in Mpumalanga province in South Africa. **Figure 1** shows a map of the KNP. Data was collected from Matsulu Township, KaNyamazane Township and Luphisi Homeland area situated in Nelspruit on the south and south east borders of the KNP.

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Kruger National Park

Kruger National Park

Figure 1: Kruger National Park [basemap]. Scale Not Given. March 10, 2021. Layers retrieved from SANParks Data Repository (Rivers_main, Entrance Gates, Landscapes). <http://dataknp.sanparks.org/sanparks/metacat/>

2.2 Methods used

A mixed concurrent method was adopted for the chapter. Veal (2011) posits that a mixed-method of data collection is needed for deeper data collection and analyses. The research project used two different data collection tools with six different stakeholders to develop an understanding of the different dynamics around the research problem. Data was ethically collected. A study information sheet and consent forms were used in the research project. These documents were available in English and the local language. All participants were voluntarily recruited after the study information sheet was read and explained to them. The participants also gave their approval for the interviews to be recorded (signed consent forms).

2.3 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, which constituted four different groups: KNP staff members, SHRs, high school tourism educators and tourism experts. Purposive sampling was used to identify key informants to be interviewed. Different semi-structured interview guides were

designed for each key informant group to achieve the objective of the study that referred to that particular group: KNP; Honorary Rangers; and tourism teachers. KNP staff members were selected as they are the custodians of the protected area, trusted by SANParks to carry out the mandate of both the people and of conservation. SHRs and tourism teachers were interviewed to determine the knowledge of volunteering initiatives amongst those groups. The interviews with SHRs were crucial in getting their input into educating the general public about conservation and determining their views on diversity in the SHR organisation. Some SHR's were interviewed over the telephone. Some of the SHR's, including the tourism experts, preferred to email their feedback. On-site face-to-face interviews were recorded using a voice recorder, while handwritten notes were made and photos were taken using an iPad. Notes were also made during each interview to serve as 'memory joggers' for the important matters or indicate the emphasis placed by each respondent in their feedback.

A total of nine interviews were conducted with SANParks staff members of the KNP (Phalaborwa, Letaba and Skukuza campsites) and another nine interviews were conducted with senior SHRs volunteers as follows via telephone (1), email (6) and on-site interviews at Phalaborwa camp (1) and at Skukuza camp (1) in September 2014. It must be noted that the SHR that was interviewed at Skukuza was originally based at Malelane. Four tourism educators from the four local high schools teaching tourism as an elective subject were also interviewed in the month of October 2014.

2.4 Questionnaire

Probability sampling was adopted for the household survey using a structured questionnaire. A purposive sampling method was adopted for third-year and BTech Tourism students from the University of Johannesburg, also using a structured questionnaire. The researcher administered the surveys. The questionnaire comprised 16 close-ended and open-ended questions. Final-year students were included since, as senior students who would be working in the industry soon, their knowledge of and understanding about the SANParks Honorary Rangers programme and conservation volunteering activities would indicate the dissemination of such initiatives.

Seventy-one completed questionnaires were collected from local communities from the targeted areas bordering KNP on the south and south east, namely: Matsulu Township, KaNyamazane Township and Luphisi Homeland area in October 2014. A total of 65 responses were received from the University of Johannesburg's third-year and BTech Tourism students.

2.5 Data analysis

The data was analysed using descriptive statistics and selective coding techniques. The analyses followed content analysis style (thematic and descriptive in nature), where coding (selective coding, axial coding and open coding) was applied using themes and sub-themes developed from research objectives. Goldman (2012) notes that axial coding takes place when data is put back together in an innovative way by making connections between categories and when axial coding categories are merged, new ones identified and categories that bore no relevance to the aim and objectives of the study are rejected. Furthermore, open coding entails careful inspection of the data, with the goal of breaking down the data into units of meaning, as it occurs through close examination of the data, and ascribing labels to concepts as they present themselves in the data. Lastly, Goldman (2012) claims that selective coding is the selection of a core category that relates to all other categories, thus selecting the real meaning of what is being investigated.

3. Findings and discussion

Two broad themes emerged from the findings: 1) the role of education initiatives in promoting volunteering; and 2) social inclusion. The chapter provides recommendations on how to advance the state conservation authorities' objectives and how to promote equitable social inclusion on their volunteering programmes.

3.1 Education initiatives in promoting volunteering

People's actions reflect what they understand to be important and what they value. Volunteering in green spaces and protected areas can be an avenue for people who are passionate about conservation to devote some of their time to promote and strengthen such initiatives. Learning about conservation and the importance of parks for the nation but also for each individual can have positive effects on people's lives (Du Toit, Erasmus & Strydom, 2012). However, the results of the study reveal that the majority of the respondents are unaware of the conservation volunteering opportunities and biodiversity conservation. Six out of 10 community members stated that they didn't have knowledge about conservation-focused volunteer organisations in their country. The quote below illustrates this perfectly:

Group 6: *"The majority of our people lack information about conservation."*

The lack of knowledge about biodiversity conservation is not restricted to community members. Fifty-two percent (question 2) of the respondents indicated that they had the subject of Conservation or Environmental Studies at school, but some stated that it was not in the syllabus form, meaning the teacher had personally been responsible for adding the content. Eighty-six percent (question 7) of respondents indicated that they did not have knowledge about conservation-orientated volunteer organisations in the country, and only eleven percent indicated that they have some knowledge. Ninety-eight percent (question 11) of the students indicated that they think it is important for them to take part in helping to conserve and protect the parks. Furthermore, 92% (question 12) indicated that they think conservation-orientated volunteer organisations such as the SANParks Honorary Rangers can play a role in increasing South Africans' voluntary involvement and participation in protecting natural resources such as parks. In addition, 92% (question 6) indicated that they would be willing to participate should they be given a chance to get involved in conservation volunteer activities.

The lack of knowledge about the importance of biodiversity conservation amongst community members, coupled with the fact that about half of the students state that they had conservation studies at school, indicate that this is a structural problem. Furthermore, some of those community members who had an idea about conservation-orientated volunteer organisations in the country felt that it is not easy to become part of the conservation volunteer organisations. When discussing joining the SHRs or an ecotourism conservation effort with the community members, the following was stated:

Community Respondent Group 6 (different people in one household): *"We do not understand how the organisations (SHRs) operate. 2. Their application forms are not user-friendly. 3. Their way of communication is not easy for an uneducated person to understand. 4. Government must intervene through it [to make it accessible and understandable to us]."*

This suggests that conservation volunteer organisations need to make changes within their organisations in order to cater for historically disadvantaged individuals (HDIs). The other issue highlighted by these findings is the absence of biodiversity conservation studies in the high school curriculum. The current national school curriculum of South Africa aims to equip all learners – irrespective

of socio-economic background, race and gender and physical or intellectual ability – with the knowledge, skills and values necessary to be meaningful participatory citizens of a free country. It can be argued that the curriculum does not always help much in aligning our students with 'meaningful participation' when it comes to conservation studies. The lack of information at high school level in some areas/rural areas may be affecting a majority of students as some only get to learn about conservation studies when pursue their tertiary education. The quote below from a tourism student suggests getting students from different educational levels together:

Tourism Student Respondent 17: *"Include modules related to conservation and get students from the high school to tertiary level involved."*

In most cases, this is too late to make an informed choice and understand the role of tourism studies, ecotourism and issues such as volunteering in parks. The lack of knowledge negatively affects students who should be motivated in tourism subjects and conservation lectures at high school – especially if they are in communities who combine their livelihoods with the success of the parks in ecotourism activities – to conduct research on conservation or local community ecotourism-related studies.

Some of community members felt that conservation education should begin at a very early age at school, as evident in the quote below:

Community respondent – Group 10: *"We think it will be better if this study can be introduced at school level so that the kids can grow up with the knowledge and it will make it easier for them to volunteer because they will grow up with the interest and love of nature."*

Conservation strategies that can be used to promote biodiversity education and hands-on experience for communities can trigger the desire and passion to protect/conservate the natural resources in the protected areas. To complement education strategies, the marketing division could develop campaigns to encourage high school learners to participate in conservation volunteering, like SHRs. Such programmes speak directly to the development of citizenship constituency in conservation. The Batho Pele White Paper (1997) is aimed at providing a policy framework and a practical implementation strategy for the transformation of Public Service Delivery. This White Paper is primarily about how public services are provided, and specifically about improving the efficiency

and effectiveness of the way in which services are delivered (Department of Public Service and Administration, 1997:11). The Batho Pele White Paper signalled a strong government intention to adopt a citizen-orientated approach to service delivery, informed by the eight Batho Pele principles of consultation, service standards, access, courtesy, information, openness and transparency, redress and value for money (Department of Public Service and Administration, 1997:16-17). This infers that SANParks' activities as a public park should embrace diversity in the people who work for the parks and who visit the parks, with continuous transparent and ethical communication about why parks and wild areas are important and why volunteering plays an important role in this future.

Coding resulted in a conceptualisation of three selective key themes: 1) volunteerism and the Constitution; 2) the Department of Education's conservation education; and 3) adult conservation education. Regarding the Department of Education's conservation education and adult conservation education: the findings indicate that the theme should be taken into consideration as respondents indicated the importance of introducing conservation education in schools by the Department of Education. In addition, adult education (adults not attending school) about conservation is a matter of consideration by protected areas, possibly through SHRs and other possible conservation volunteering programmes. Furthermore, adult education should be extended to high school teachers as all interviewed teachers indicated that they have never received any formal training, including orientation about student educational programmes offered by SANParks, for example the Cape to Cairo Programme and the SANParks Junior HR Programme.

A study by Du Toit *et al.*, (2012) strongly supports the power of learning and teaching in volunteering, highlighting that the communities learn their role in supporting the park, and, by being exposed to the tourism industry, community members might also create economic opportunities from this experience. In light of this, increasing the number of HDIs in the Honorary Ranger organisation would benefit both the park and the community.

3.2 Social inclusion

The voluntary work done by the SHRs in SANParks has been praised in the SANParks' annual reports, the KNP homepage, SANParks Honorary Rangers webpage and a local newspaper (Lowvelder). Despite the success of such initiatives, the programme struggles to reach those who live on the other side of the park's fences. Local communities identified the following challenges that prevented them from volunteering: lack of knowledge, lack of skills, language/communication barrier, park access constraints and socio-economic barriers.

These challenges contribute to a lack of interest in conservation volunteering, especially in the communities where human basic needs have not been met yet. This suggests that, to attract HDIs, volunteering organisations would have to make structural changes.

A high number of volunteers indicate that there is support for the park and its conservation measures, thus the higher the number of volunteers, especially from historically disadvantaged race groups, the higher the environmental awareness and the stronger the support for the park. This is why diversity in the volunteer group is key in establishing the support for the park. Having a diverse volunteer group will ensure a brighter future for the SHRs as an organisation because every South African citizen from any background will start to see the organisation as their own and take the opportunity to serve in the organisation. In addition, this act would provide a sound succession plan as the matured volunteers oversee the junior HRs. This speaks to the educational dimension of such initiatives as a way to not only fill in a need for conservation education, but also to become attractive to different groups of people.

Over 90% of community members mentioned poverty and unemployment as some of the challenges preventing them from doing anything else, including volunteering. Conservation volunteering might not be well known, but volunteering, however, is not new to these communities. Prior to 1994, communities volunteered to fight the injustices of the apartheid system. Increased knowledge of volunteering opportunities and what volunteering entails could lead to increased numbers of volunteers in parks. Potentially, this knowledge about conservation and the tourism industry related to it could lead to community members benefiting from the tourism influx generated by the parks. However, this brings into play another barrier in that these volunteers may not have the skills to run tourism jobs. This creates a cycle that will be perpetuated as long as local community schools are unable to teach tourism and conservation studies and integrate the possibility of training at university level for a tourism/conservation-related career.

Another challenge for local communities is the cost of volunteering. Although these are non-paid opportunities, they do carry a cost that might be too expensive to some community members. To volunteer requires one to travel, which costs money. Volunteers need to have clean uniforms, which carries the underlying assumption that volunteers live in areas with a stable water supply. Thus, on top of acquiring conservation knowledge, one needs to be financially and socio-economically sound, and have time to be able to volunteer. The

following excerpts illustrate how socio-economic challenges continue to prevent HDIs from volunteering:

KNP Respondent 8: *"My personal feeling is that, you can "be" a volunteer of any something if you have a passion about it. My answer will be, it must be passion driven. Volunteers in this case SHR's, we are not compensating them in any way. They volunteer while they pay their own fuel to come here, they pay for their accommodation where they are staying, while doing duties here and they pay for their meals. So if you talk volunteerism it is in the true sense of the word."*

KNP staff member: 4: *"Yes, at times it costs you in different scenarios. It will cost in a sense that you need to have transport from Phalaborwa gate to Letaba camp, the closest camp. It will also cost when doing duties at the gate which is not much, because it is at the door step. Yeah, it does cost money but you don't have to be rich to become a SHR, but you must be able to put petrol to Letaba and back let's say about R150.00."*

Communication about and dissemination of not only information but also of opportunities is another identified challenge. The importance of local language usage, especially with the HDIs, is vital, especially when communicating with illiterate elderly community members. Enhancement of marketing platforms and advertising the SHR's and KNP/its activities on local/community newspaper, national radio (Ligwalagwala FM), community radio, visits by volunteers are suggested by local community members.

HRs Respondent 3: *"Having been a SHR for many years, I think the marketing is a lot better now. However, it is still unclear to me how this appeals to local KNP communities and if the concept of volunteering in conservation appeals to them. The marketing in my opinion is not pitched at the right level and needs to be community specific."*

In addition, there seems to no marketing of volunteering programmes directed at tertiary students. The following excerpt indicates that there is no knowledge of an integrated marketing strategy/programme aimed at educating tertiary students except for the junior SHR's programme.

SHR Respondent 3: *"Within SHR I don't think there are marketing strategies for tourism students. I don't believe this avenue has been fully explored. Unless there is something specific within SHR that would attract tourism students, it is unlikely that the SHR programme would yield a sustainable interest in SHR for students. It really depends on what students are aiming to achieve. Within SHR I've always believed that what you put in is what you will get out. Like with most things in life, it's what you make of it!"*

This is a pool of potential of SHRs volunteers who already chose the field of tourism and conservation, soon to become involved in the industry. The same students can be envisaged as ambassadors of the organisations in their households and communities and amongst their peers in the university community.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

In conclusion, challenges related to education on school and university level and social inclusion prevent a more diverse participation in the SHRs programme in the area researched. This chapter recommends socio-economic and financial solutions, eco-education programmes presented using local language/s and the establishment of communication channels suitable for average township/homeland community members as ways to try to overcome these challenges.

To oversee the coordination and implementation of the recommendations made, a task team with local community representatives, SANParks staff and Honorary Rangers is advisable. The inclusion of local community members would promote a sense of ownership and it would establish communication between the community as whole and the institution. The team can include academics, community members' representative/s, SANPark/KNP, office of the MEC/Premier, SHRs, both primary and high school educators and the Department of Basic Education. A development of SHRs and SANParks marketing strategy, which would be specially designed to target such communities, is highly recommended. Based on the findings of this chapter, recommendations for further research are suggested to guide the contribution to and building of a diverse, knowledgeable volunteer organisation.

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