



# **Cultural landscape perspective: Is this a way forward?**

**Michelle Cocks**

**“Culture and nature“ - Mini-symposium**

10<sup>th</sup> Annual Thicket Forum Conference, 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> September 2013

## Cultural landscapes

- Cultural landscapes as a concept is increasingly be used to indicate how the relationships between human activity and the environment have created location-specific patterns of ecological, socioeconomic and cultural conditions.
- Cultural landscapes do not just reflect the outcomes of human practices on the initial environmental conditions; they also reflect the cultural values that inform those practices (Ramakrishnan, 1996).

## Cultural landscape approach in conservation

- In other parts of the world attention has been given to the inclusion of people in the landscape.
- Cultural landscape has been incorporated into conservation policies since the 1990s (e.g. Ramakrishnan 1996; Farina 2000).
- Cultural landscapes has become recognized internationally by world bodies such as the WWF, IUCN and UNESCO.
- “Sacred natural sites and cultural landscapes” are included in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (Alcamo *et al.* 2003).



## South African context

- Until the late 80's within the South African context, which was heavily influenced by international trends of the time, local communities were largely portrayed as spoiling or degrading natural landscapes.
- Attention has been directed at documenting their negative impact on natural environments.



Gathering techniques used often leads to death of the tree.



Informal gatherer-hawkers

This resulted:

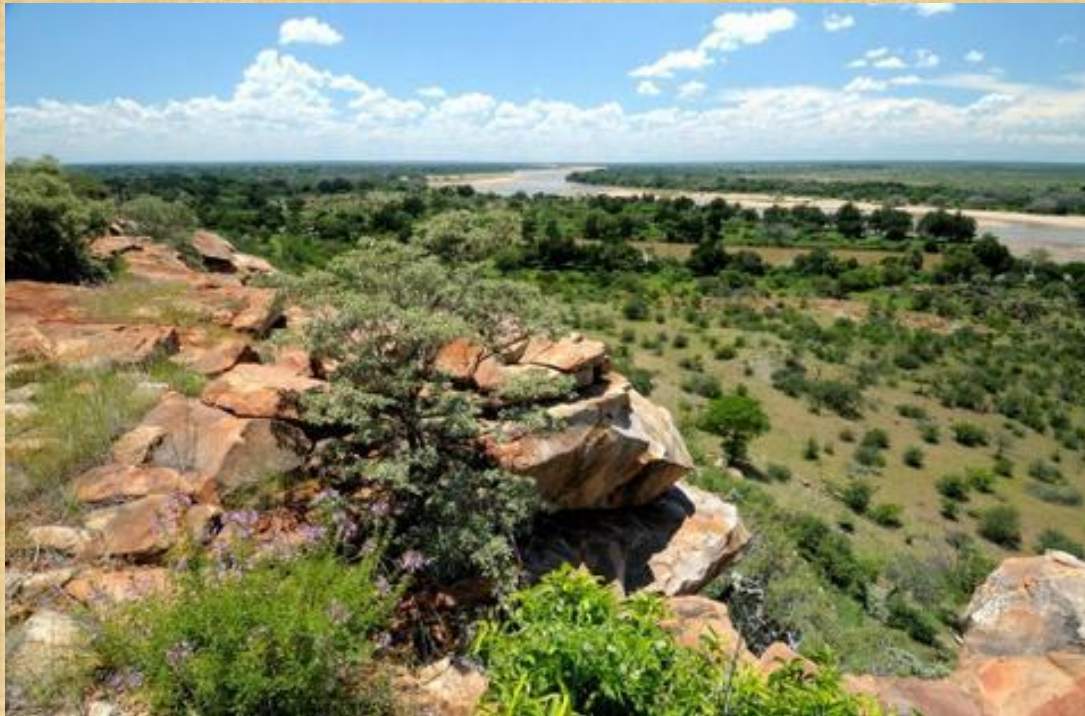


## Reflection on relevant South African legislation

- South Africa has adopted frameworks for community participation in conservation. eg National Forests Act (1998), the White Paper on Sustainable Forest Use and Management (1997), the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (2004) and The Communal Lands Act (2004).
- Several calls have been made to interpret participation not only as local cooperation with professional conservation practices, but also as indicating the need “to give full recognition to cultural and spiritual values [of biodiversity] in order to promote a truly integral policy of nature conservation” (Pappayanis and Mallarach 2005: 242).

## Continued....

- Despite this formal acknowledgement of social and cultural dimensions of biodiversity conservation, only a few isolated examples exist where cultural landscapes have become formally included in conservation programmes.
- Places of implementation have been restricted to formal conservation areas, such as the Mapungubwe World Heritage



**THE WORLD  
HERITAGE SEAL IS A  
GUARANTEE OF  
PRESERVATION”.**

Simon Usborne - The  
Independent  
Newspaper UK 29th  
April 2009

**Centre of the historic kingdom, and exclusive domain of the royal family: Mapungubwe mountain, where the gold foil rhino found.**

## Continued.....

- The concept of cultural landscape has hardly been given attention in relation to contemporary communal areas inhabited by local communities, particularly within the former homelands.



A sacred grove of umhlontlo trees (*Euphorbia tetragona*) remains undisturbed as the village grows around it.



# ***Forests as essential places for maintaining well-being and cultural identity***



**Natural landscapes provide social identity (initiates during *ukwaluko* - seclusion period)**

**Natural landscapes provide religious affirmation through access to sacred sites.**



**Natural landscapes provide religious meaning (sacred pool)**



## *Homestead as locations for religious ceremonies*



*Ubuhlanthi* (kraal) as symbolic status



Religious affirmation through ceremonies

Within each homestead the kraal forms a major cultural artefact.

These *ubuhlanti* feature prominently in Xhosa idioms, and expressions.

Within the Amathole region about 80% of the *umzi* still own and maintain an *ubuhlanti*.

## *Homestead (umzi) as location for ceremonial practices*



The *igoqo* refers to woodpiles situated outside each *umzi*, these are still maintained within 40% of all homesteads in the Amathole region .

*Igoqo* is an social status symbol signifying a housewife's status.

Women's identity and rituals centre around the *igoqo* as with *ubuhlanti* for men.



## Conclusion

- These examples illustrate cultural landscapes as vital areas for combining cultural heritage preservation and safeguarding cultural and biological diversity .
- It is however important to recognize that cultural landscapes include values that are conservation oriented, but also practices (over grazing, over harvesting of plants used for spiritual purposes) that may result in degradation.
- These expressions and practices should be used as elements in social-learning based approaches to develop culturally sensitive approaches towards biodiversity and cultural heritage conservation in community areas.
- In order to use this as a tool it is imperative that we have more of an understanding of cultural associations and expressions of local communities to their community environment as a place of heritage.

## Conclusion

- Issues of sense of place and cultural landscape heritage also has relevance to spatial planning policy and legislation which currently gives no attention to these issues.
- Conservation policy and legislation does but it has only been implemented in areas associated with formally designed conservation reserves.
- We therefore need a more inclusive approach towards conservation is needed to reflect such values outside of protected reserves.
- This requires a shift from only seeing conservation taking place within professionally designed landscape elements but to also include organically evolved, associative cultural landscapes.
- This will ensure that the processes of co-evolution between nature and culture and the often long-enduring religious and spiritual value and practice systems in dealing with nature are reflected appropriately.

A sepia-toned photograph of a beach. In the foreground, gentle waves with white foam wash onto the sand. In the middle ground, a line of white surf marks the edge of a larger wave. In the background, a dark, rocky coastline is visible under a pale sky. The overall tone is warm and nostalgic.

## Acknowledgements

- Photo's: Tony Dold

Thank you