



Relational Hubs for Collaborative Landscape Stewardship

Jessica Cockburn^a, Georgina Cundill^b, Sheona Shackleton^c, Ayanda Cele^d,
Susanna Francina (Anicia) Cornelius^e, Vaughan Koopman^f, Jean-Pierre le Roux^g,
Nicky McLeod^h, Mathieu Rougetⁱ, Samantha Schroder^j, Dieter Van den Broeck^k,
Dale R. Wright^l, and Marijn Zwinkels^e

^aDepartment of Education, Environmental Learning Research Centre, Rhodes University, Makhanda/Grahamstown, South Africa; ^bInternational Development Research Centre, Ottawa, Canada; ^cAfrican Climate and Development Initiative, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa; ^dWWF-South Africa, Hilton, South Africa; ^eLiving Lands, Cape Town, South Africa; ^fIndependent Researcher, Hilton, South Africa; ^gEndangered Wildlife Trust, Johannesburg, South Africa; ^hEnvironmental and Rural Solutions, Matatiele, South Africa; ⁱCentre for International Cooperation in Development-Oriented Agronomical Research (CIRAD), Plant Populations and Bioaggressors in Tropical Ecosystems Joint Research Unit (UMR PVBMT), La Réunion, France; ^jIndependent Researcher, Cape Town, South Africa; ^kCommonland, Amsterdam, The Netherlands; ^lBirdLife South Africa, Cape Town, South Africa

ABSTRACT

Landscape stewardship is considered an important place-based approach to addressing sustainability challenges. Working at landscape-level requires collaboration between diverse landscape stakeholders. In this study, we partnered with local stewardship practitioners across six cases in South Africa to investigate how they facilitate collaboration towards social-ecological sustainability outcomes. We found that practitioners facilitate collaboration among stakeholders by operating as relational hubs in the landscape. Through these hubs, they build new inter-personal relationships among stakeholders, creating social networks which enable stewardship practice. The hubs deepen human-nature relationships by creating enabling conditions for stewards to put stewardship ethics into action. Drawing on insights from these cases, we call for a relational approach to landscape stewardship which focuses on human-to-human and human-to-nature relationships. Moreover, we argue that landscape stewardship initiatives need to re-focus stewardship on stewards, recognizing them as key agents of change in addressing the conflict between agriculture and conservation inherent in many landscapes.

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Introduction

Global calls for stewardship have initiated a surge in sustainability science and conservation research (Bennett et al. 2018; Peçanha Enqvist et al. 2018), echoing concerns about the consequences of unsustainable human interactions with the planet (Folke et al. 2016). Place-based stewardship to support efforts towards global sustainability emerges as a clear focus in social-ecological systems and resilience research (Cockburn et al. 2018).

CONTACT Jessica Cockburn  jessicacockburn@gmail.com  Department of Education, Environmental Learning Research Centre, Rhodes University, Makhanda/Grahamstown 6139, South Africa.

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